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THE FIRST STAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY WAS BY LAND, TO
MONTEGO BAY

A
HIGH WIND
IN JAMAICA

(THE INNOCENT VOYAGE)

by RICHARD HUGHES

Introduction by ISABEL PATERSON

THE
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NEW YORK



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A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA

(THE INNOCENT VOYAGE)

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Preface

ON a day otherwise unremembered, *The Innocent Voyage* reposed in a pile of new books at my elbow for several hours, as unsuspected as a stick of dynamite wrapped in gilt paper. The opening chapter had been printed in the *Century Magazine*, with the title *High Wind in Jamaica*. Thus detached, it appeared to be complete; and might be taken for a factual narrative, composed from first-hand accounts, perhaps old letters or journals. It told of a night of terror endured by an English family, the Bas-Thorntons, on a Jamaica plantation. Father, mother and half a dozen children huddled in the cellar, while a hurricane all but unroofed the house. It made a lasting impression of the physical and psychic effects



over, and shakes the bases of logic, leaving a sense of imminent unbalance. Perhaps an earthquake does the same, destroying the unconscious security with which we go our pedestrian way. The earth, of course, is there for us to stand upon. If it isn't going to stay put, where are we?

Now this disturbance is not produced by any description of physical violence. The hurricane is merely an introduction. Thereafter the terror lurks in what doesn't happen. One is suspended over the abyss by a thread which is not allowed to break. But it could break. In life, it does sometimes break. That we know. And here it is brought home inescapably, as a part of personal experience.

At the time, trying to laugh it off, and under the necessity of summarizing the plot, it occurred to me to say that it is an account of the melancholy fate of a crew of well-meaning pirates who fell into the clutches of half a dozen children. To my bewilderment,

charm, they are nuisances and bores. To a harassed guardian, original sin is a convenient definition of the motive of their activities. Translated into terms of impulse and environmental resistance, original sin is a fact. All animals, man included, seek satisfaction of the primal appetites: they must have nourishment, shelter, and free muscular play. Also there is the social need for approval and affection. Frustration evokes anger and all the other elements of the seven deadly sins. But normal children cannot reasonably be called monsters. They obey natural law. They are not even anti-social, since they adapt themselves to discipline as well as they know how. Wickedness involves knowledge of the nature of good and evil. The Bas-Thornton children were quite innocent.

To regard them as monsters is a rather curious confession, an adult evasion of responsibility. It is to expect that children should learn without being taught, discriminate

without experience, and save themselves by
their own wits.

Miss Rebecca West adumbrated this in her critical comment. She suggested that children have been made the emotional scapegoats of the modern conscience, as women were assigned the function of "vessels of iniquity" by early Christian theologians of the ascetic school. Miss West cited in support of this theory the works of André Gide and other writers with a leaning toward the perverse.

It may be so, though we should not have read any such intention into what Richard Hughes wrote.

What he seems to stress is the complete disparity between the two worlds of childhood and maturity, which are materially the same world. The difference is psychological, and results in wholly different standards.

Those of the Bas-Thornton children who escaped unharmed from their piratical excursion, would remember most clearly the two



pigs they played with on the pirate ship, and the monkey which they emulated. To Emily Bas-Thornton the terror of the hurricane was epitomized in the death of the family cat. Being unaware of the bloody business of the pirates, Emily found their society agreeable, until one of them ordered her to stop sliding down the deck because she would wear out her drawers. She was unable to believe her ears. The mention of drawers in mixed company was an unthinkable indecency. After being rescued, she was equally outraged by the suggestion of a refined young lady, that Emily should address her by her first name. It was very near to sacrilege.

The implicit shudder is not wholly derived from the unsuspecting helplessness of the children against the powers of evil. A rather ragged illusion of justice might be patched up by calling in heaven to compensate such tender victims, with the assurance of divine vengeance upon the villains. But what is to be said

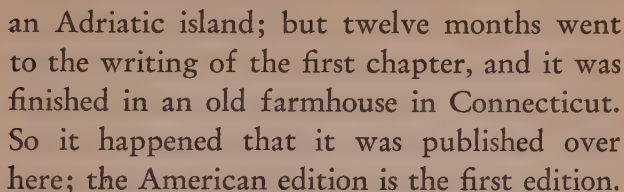


The genesis of such a book is purely intellectual, and the form is bound to be largely a matter of accident. Richard Hughes has explained that the first suggestion came to him from "a page or two of foolscap, on which an old lady had described how she, as a child, had been on board the brig *Zephyr* when it was captured by pirates off the Cuban coast. The children had actually spent an hour or so on board the pirate vessel, where they had been treated with every kindness before being returned to their own ship. But suppose, I thought, they had never been returned to the brig; and instead, the pirates had somehow been landed with this uncomfortable booty? The idea took fire in my mind. I looked up the records of the case; and even found an account afterwards written by the mate of the *Zephyr*, who was carried off by the pirates and lived with them for two years."

Ford Madox Ford, in his *Return to Yesterday*, identifies the historical incident with the

career of Aaron Smith, "the last pirate who was ever tried at the Old Bailey." An account of the trial, to which he was directed by Dr. Garnett in the British Museum, supplied Ford and Joseph Conrad with the elements of the plot of *Romance*, on which they collaborated. A comparison of the two stories, drawn from the same source, indicates the transforming power of the creative imagination. Mr. Ford remarks: "I had made him (Aaron Smith) an agreeable person who ended up as a country gentleman. Mr. Hughes made him a lousy and lachrymose scoundrel who was duly hanged in chains on Thames Bank at Gallions Reach." And Mr. Ford adds that he considers *The Innocent Voyage* "the best thing that had come out of Wales or the British Empire since the war."

Five years elapsed before Mr. Hughes was ready to work out completely the idea of *The Innocent Voyage*. It was begun in Wales, and brooded over during a six-month sojourn on



Mr. Hughes was in the United States not as a visiting celebrity; he came over obscurely and uncomfortably in the steerage, moved by a desire to see the world. He has been here three times in the course of his peregrinations. His is a restless spirit, combining the elements of a mixed inheritance. His family was of Welsh extraction, of that adventurous strain which followed the Tudors to the wider field of English life. They exchanged their Welsh nobility for the lot of English country gentlemen, and furnished several admirals to the British Navy. Yet after three hundred years Mr. Hughes returned to Wales as to his home. Wales was "the right place." There he keeps a small cottage as a point of departure for his wanderings. But the scope of his experience is rather re-

practice of writing as a trade, however honest, and the pursuit of literature, writing as an art. Some of his juvenile efforts, naïve and yet characteristic, have lately been published in the *Richard Hughes Omnibus*—since we cannot now leave to posterity the privilege of knowing the worst. This miscellany also includes sketches, short stories and plays, with an autobiographical preface. All are relatively interesting by reason of their imaginative quality, which sometimes flowers into wild fantasy. The verse, for which one infers he has a special reminiscent tenderness, is that of a distinguished prose writer in the making. It lacks the essential lyric note, and is a vehicle for metaphysical speculation. A taste for mathematics also ties up with this philosophical bent, which was to come to mature expression in *The Innocent Voyage*.

His apprenticeship was passed in good company. Having passed through Charterhouse as a prize scholar, after an interval of a few

months as a private in the British Army during the war, he went up to Oxford. There he met as fellow students, Robert Graves, Robert Nicholls, Aldous Huxley and Edmund Blunden; also T. E. Lawrence of Arabian fame. At that time Yeats, Masfield, Robert Bridges and A. E. Coppard resided near Oxford. The atmosphere was electrical, inspiring; and Mr. Hughes gained his first recognition from authors whose accomplishments he respected. The windows of the university opened on the world. He was not anxious for immediate wider fame; he feared it almost, as prejudicial to opportunities of further anonymous contacts with life. So at intervals he broke away, for walking tours and foreign excursions, which he undertook recklessly with scanty funds. Or not perhaps recklessly, but deliberately, to ensure the greatest variety of contacts. So he consorted with tramps, gypsies, refugees, in dosshouses and under hedges. He does not wholly recommend this course to

Innocent Voyage is that it is a tragi-comedy of Good and Evil, to which each reader must supply his own moral.

ISABEL PATERSON.

NEW YORK,
January, 1932.

Chapter One

ONE of the fruits of Emancipation in the West Indian islands is the number of ruins, either attached to the houses that remain or within a stone's throw of them: ruined slaves' quarters, ruined sugar-grinding houses, ruined boiling houses; often ruined mansions that were too expensive to maintain. Earthquake, fire, rain, and deadlier vegetation, did their work quickly.

One scene is very clear in my mind, in Jamaica. There was a vast stone-built house called Derby Hill (where the Parkers lived). It had been the centre of a very prosperous plantation. With Emancipation, like many others, that went *bung*. The sugar buildings fell down. Bush smothered the cane and

tyrants to lend her a print dress, and came and pottered about in the mess half-heartedly: tried to wipe the old blood and feathers of slaughtered chickens from a gilt-and-marble table: tried to talk sensibly: tried to wind an ormolu clock: and then gave it up and mooned away back to bed. Not long after this, I believe, they were both starved altogether to death. Or, if that were hardly possible in so prolific a country, perhaps given ground glass—rumour varied. At any rate, they died.

That is the sort of scene which makes a deep impression on the mind; far deeper than the ordinary, less romantic, every-day thing which shows the real state of an island in the statistical sense. Of course, even in the transition period one only found melodrama like this in rare patches. More truly typical was Ferndale, for instance, an estate about fifteen miles away from Derby Hill. Here only the overseer's house remained: the Big

House had altogether collapsed and been smothered over. It consisted of a ground floor of stone, given over to goats and the children, and a first floor of wood, the inhabited part, reached from outside by a double flight of wooden steps. When the earthquakes came the upper part only slid about a little, and could be jacked back into position with big levers. The roof was of shingles: after very dry weather it leaked like a sieve, and the first few days of the rainy season would be spent in a perpetual general-post of beds and other furniture to escape the drips, until the wood swelled.

The people who lived there at the time I have in mind were called Bas-Thornton: not natives of the Island, "Creoles", but a family from England. Mr. Bas-Thornton had a business of some kind in St. Anne's, and used to ride there every day on a mule. He had such long legs that his stunted mount made him look rather ridiculous: and being quite as

temperamental as a mule himself a quarrel between the two was generally worth watching.

Close to the dwelling were the ruined grinding and boiling houses. These two are never quite cheek by jowl: the grinding house is set on higher ground, with a water-wheel to turn the immense iron vertical rollers. From these the cane juice runs down a wedge-shaped trough to the boiling house, where a negro stands and rinses a little lime-wash into it with a grass brush to make it granulate. Then it is emptied into big copper vats, over furnaces burning faggots and *trash*, or squeezed-out cane. "There a few negroes stand, skimming the poppling vats with long-handled copper ladles, while their friends sit round, eating sugar or chewing trash, in a mist of hot vapour." What they skim off oozes across the floor with an admixture of a good deal of filth—insects, even rats, and whatever sticks to negroes' feet—

—into another basin, thence to be distilled into rum.

This, at any rate, is how it used to be done. I know nothing of modern methods—nor if there are any, never having visited the island since 1860, which is a long time ago now.

But long before that, even, all this was over at Ferndale: the big copper vats were overturned, and up in the grinding house the three great rollers lay about loose. No water reached it: the stream had gone about its own business elsewhere. The Bas-Thornton children used to crawl into the cut-well through the vent, among dead leaves and the wreck of the wheel. There, one day, they found a wild-cat's nest, with the mother away. The kittens were tiny, and Emily tried to carry them home in her pinafore; but they bit and scratched so fiercely, right through her thin frock, that she was very glad—except for pride—that they all escaped but one. This

always ready to settle any point in question, and whose rule was a rule of iron—especially over Rachel, Edward, and Laura, the little ones (or Liddlies, as they came to be known in the family). To Emily, his interpreter, he allowed of course certain privileges: and with John, who was older than Emily, he quite wisely did not interfere.

He was omnipresent: the fairies were more localised, living in a small hole in the hill guarded by two dagger-plants.

The best fun at the bathing-pool was had with a big forked log. John would sit astride the main stem, and the others pushed him about by the two prongs. The little ones, of course, only splashed about the shallow end: but John and Emily dived. John, that is to say, dived properly, head-foremost: Emily only jumped in feet first, stiff as a rod; but she, on the other hand, would go off higher boughs than he would. Once, when she was



Lame-foot Sam was the one who told most stories. He used to sit all day on the stone barbecues where the pimento was dried, digging maggots out of his toes. This seemed at first very horrid to the children, but he seemed quite contented; and when jiggers got under their own skins, and laid their little bags of eggs there, it was not absolutely unpleasant. John used to get quite a sort of thrill from rubbing the place. Sam told them the Anansi stories: Anansi and the Tiger, and how Anansi looked after the Crocodile's nursery, and so on. Also he had a little poem which impressed them very much:

Quacko Sam

Him bery fine man:

Him dance all de dances dat de darkies can:

Him dance de schottische, him dance de Cod Reel:


Him dance ebery kind of dance till him foot-
bottom peel.

Perhaps that was how old Sam's own afflic-

tion first came about: he was very sociable. He was *said* to have a great many children.

ii

The stream which fed the bathing-hole ran into it down a gully through the bush. It offered an enticing vista for exploring: but somehow the children did not often go up it very far. Every stone on the way had to be overturned, in the hope of finding cray-fish: or if not, John had to take a sporting gun, which he bulleted with spoonfuls of water to shoot humming-birds on the wing—too tiny frail quarry for any solider projectile. For, only a few yards up, there was a Frangipani tree: a mass of brilliant blossom and no leaves, which was almost hidden in a cloud of humming-birds so vivid as much to outshine the flowers. Writers have often lost their way trying to explain how brilliant a


 jewel the humming-bird is: it cannot be
 done.

They build their wee woollen nests on the tips of twigs, where no snake can reach them. They are devoted to their eggs, and will not move though you touch them. But they are so delicate the children never did that: they held their breath and stared and stared—and were out-stared.

Somehow, the celestial vividness of this barrier generally arrested them. It was seldom any of them explored further: only once, I think, on a day when Emily was feeling peculiarly irritated.

It was her own tenth birthday. They had frittered away the whole morning in the glass-like gloom of the bathing hole. Now John sat naked on the bank making a wicker trap. In the shallows the small ones rolled and chuckled. Emily, for coolness, sat up to her chin in water, and hundreds of infant fish were tickling with their inquisitive mouths

every inch of her body, a sort of expressionless light kissing.

Anyhow she had lately come to hate being touched—but this was abominable. At last, when she could stand it no longer, she clambered out and dressed. Rachel and Laura were too small for a long walk: and the last thing, she felt, that she wanted was to have one of the boys with her: so she stole quietly past John's back, scowling balefully at him for no particular reason. Soon she was out of sight among the bushes.

She pushed on rather fast up the river bed, not taking much notice of things, for about three miles. She had never been so far afield before. Then her attention was caught by a clearing leading down to the water: and here was the source of the river. She caught her breath delightedly: it bubbled up clear and cold, through three distinct springs, under a clump of bamboos, just as a river should: the greatest possible find, and

there were no railings, and only one or two of the most terribly starved mangy cattle to keep in or out. In the middle of all was an indeterminate quagmire or muddy pond, where a group of negroes were splashing with geese and ducks.

Emily stared: they stared back. She made a movement towards them: they separated at once into the various huts, and watched her from there. Encouraged by the comfortable feeling of inspiring fright she advanced, and at last found an old creature who would talk: Dis Liberty Hill, dis Black Man's Town. Old-time niggers, dey go fer run from de bushas (overseers), go for live here. De piccanninies, dey neber seen buckras (whites) . . . And so on. It was a refuge, built by runaway slaves, and still inhabited.

And then, that her cup of happiness might be full, some of the bolder children crept out and respectfully offered her flowers—really to get a better look at her pallid face. Her

heart bubbled up in her, she swelled with glory: and taking leave with the greatest condescension she trod all the long way home on veritable air, back to her beloved family, back to a birthday cake wreathed with stephanotis, lit with ten candles, and in which it so happened that the sixpenny piece was invariably found in the birthday-person's slice.

iii

This was, fairly typically, the life of an English family in Jamaica. Mostly these only stayed a few years. The Creoles—families who had been in the West Indies for more than one generation—gradually evolved something a little more distinctive. They lost some of the traditional mental mechanism of Europe, and the outlines of a new one began to appear.

There was one such family the Bas-Thorn-

selfes and panted. It was so still you could have heard the least buzz a mile off. Not a naked fish would willingly move his tail. The ponies advanced because they must: the children ceased even to muse.

They all very nearly jumped out of their skins: for close at hand a crane had trumpeted once desperately. Then the broken silence closed down as flawless as before. They perspired twice as violently with the stimulus. Their pace grew slower and slower. It was no faster than a procession of snails that at last they reached the sea.

Exeter Rocks is a famous place. A bay of the sea, almost a perfect semi-circle, guarded by the reef: shelving white sands to span the few feet from the water to the undercut turf: and then, almost at the mid point, a jutting-out shelf of rocks right into deep water—fathoms deep. And a narrow fissure in the rocks, leading the water into a small pool, or miniature lagoon, right inside their bastion.



An hour or so after noon they clustered together, puffy from the warm water, in the insufficient shade of a Panama Fern: ate such of the food they had brought as they had appetite for; and drank all the water, wishing for more. Then a very odd thing happened: for even as they sat there they heard the most peculiar sound: a strange, rushing sound that passed overhead like a gale of wind—but not a breath of breeze stirred, *that* was the odd thing: followed by a sharp hissing and hurtling, like a flight of rockets, or gigantic swans—very distant rocs, perhaps—on the wing. They all looked up: but there was nothing at all. The sky was empty and lucid. Long before they were back in the water again all was still. Except that after a while John noticed a sort of tapping, as if someone were gently knocking the outside of a bath you were in. But the bath they were in had no outside, it was solid world. It was funny.

By sunset they were so weak from long

immersion they could barely stand up, and as salted as bacon: but, with some common impulse, just before the sun went down they all left the rocks and went and stood by their clothes, where the ponies were tethered, under some palms. As he sank the sun grew even larger and instead of red was now a sodden purple. Down he went, behind the western horn of the bay, which immediately blackened till its waterline disappeared, and substance and reflection seemed one sharp symmetrical pattern.

Not a breath of breeze even yet ruffled the water: but momentarily it trembled of its own accord, shattering the reflections: then was glassy again. On that the children held their breath, waiting for it to happen.

A school of fish, terrified by some purely submarine event, thrust their heads right out of the water, squatting across the bay in an arrowy rush, dashing up sparkling ripples with the tiny heave of their shoulders: yet


~~~~~  
lence, with a rapid countermarch, recovered all his rebellious kingdom. Stillness again. The trees moved as little as the pillars of a ruin, each leaf laid sleekly in place. The bubbling foam subsided: the reflections of the stars came out among it as if there could never have been a disturbance, however slight. The naked children too continued to stand motionless beside the quiet ponies, shine on their infantile round paunches.

But as for Emily, it was too much. The earthquake went completely to her head. She began to dance, hopping laboriously from one foot onto another. John caught the infection. He turned head over heels on the damp sand, over and over in an elliptical course till before he knew it he was in the water, and so giddy as hardly to be able to tell up from down.

At that, Emily knew what it was she wanted to do. She scrambled onto a pony







played its last, most terrible card; and small Emily had survived, where even grown men (such as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram), had succumbed.

Life seemed suddenly a little empty: for never again could there happen to her anything so dangerous, so sublime.

Meanwhile, Margaret and Jimmie were still arguing:

"Well, there's one thing, there'll be plenty of eggs tomorrow," said Jimmie. "There's nothing like an earthquake for making them lay."

How funny Creoles were! They didn't seem to realise the difference it made to a person's whole after-life to have been in an Earthquake.

When they got home, Martha, the black housemaid, had hard things to say about the sublime cataclysm. She had dusted the drawing-room china only the day before: and now



everything was covered again in a fine penetrating film of dust.

## iv

The next morning, Sunday, they went home. Emily was still so saturated in earthquake as to be dumb. She ate earthquake and slept earthquake: her fingers and legs were earthquake. With John, it was ponies. The earthquake had been fun: but it was the ponies that mattered. But at present it did not worry Emily that she was alone in her sense of proportion. She was too completely possessed to be able to see anything, or realise that anyone else pretended to even a self-delusive fiction of existence.

Their mother met them at the door. She bubbled questions: John chattered ponies, but Emily was still tongue-tied. She was,



join them. What did it now matter, that earlier woe, that being a girl she could never when grown up become a real soldier with a real sword? She had been in an Earthquake!

But even the others did not keep it up very long. (Sometimes they would go on for three or four hours.) For, whatever it might have done for Emily's soul, the earthquake had done little to clear the air. It was as hot as ever. In the animal world there seemed some strange commotion, as if they had wind of something. The usual lizards and mosquitoes were still absent: but in their place the earth's most horrid progeny, creatures of darkness, sought the open: land-crabs wandered about aimlessly, angrily twiddling their claws: and the ground seemed almost alive with red ants and cockroaches. Up on the roof the pigeons were gathered, talking to each other fearfully.

The cellar (or rather, ground floor), where



low bank of cloud. He hobbled off: but then, not too sure perhaps that Heaven would keep Its promise, changed his mind: snatched up the handkerchief and made off for his cottage. The thunder muttered louder and more angrily: but Sam ignored the warning.

It was the custom that, whenever Mr. Thornton had been to St. Anne's, John and Emily should run out to meet him, and ride back with him, one perched on each of his stirrups.

That Sunday evening they ran out as soon as they saw him coming, in spite of the thunderstorm that by now was clattering over their very heads—and not only over their heads, either, for in the Tropics a thunderstorm is not a remote affair up in the sky, as it is in England, but is all round you: lightning plays ducks and drakes across the water, bounds from tree to tree, bounces about the ground, while the thunder seems to proceed



And all the time I was thinking—but thank Heaven you're back!"

"I think the worst is over now."

Perhaps it was; but all through supper the lightning shone almost without flickering. And John and Emily could hardly eat: the memory of that momentary look on their father's face haunted them.

It was an unpleasant meal altogether. Mrs. Thornton had prepared for her husband his "favourite dish"; than which no action could more annoy a man of whim. In the middle of it all in burst Sam, ceremony dropped: he flung the handkerchief angrily on the table and stumped out.

"What on earth . . . ?" began Mr. Thornton.

But John and Emily knew; and thoroughly agreed with Sam as to the cause of the storm. Stealing was bad enough anyway: but on a Sunday!

Meanwhile, the lightning kept up its play.





his eyes blazing, talking and sometimes exclaiming in a tone of voice the children had never heard him use before, and which made their blood run cold. He seemed like one inspired in the presence of Death, he had gone utterly Delphic: and without in the passage Hell's pandemonium reigned terrifically.

The check could be only a short one. Outside the dining-room door stood the big filter, and above the door the fanlight was long since broken. Something black and yelling flashed through the fanlight, landing clean in the middle of the supper table, scattering the forks and spoons and upsetting the lamp. And another and another—but already Tabby was through the window and streaking again for the bush. The whole dozen of those wild cats leapt one after the other from the top of the filter clean through the fanlight on to the supper table, and away from there only too hot in his tracks. In a moment







audience. When that was done, she put it into the Historical—a Voice, declaring that a girl called Emily was once in an Earthquake. And so on, right through the whole thing a third time.

The horrid fate of poor Tabby appeared suddenly before her eyes, caught her un-awares: and she was all but sick again. Even her Earthquake had failed her. Caught by the incubus, her mind struggled frantically to clutch at even the outside world, as an only remaining straw. She tried to fix her interest on every least detail of the scene around her—to count the slats in the shutters, any least detail that was *outward*. So it was that for the first time she really began to notice the weather.

The wind by now was more than redoubled. The shutters were bulging as if tired elephants were leaning against them, and Father was trying to tie the fastening with that handkerchief. But to push against this







one seemed particularly interested in his news: Mrs. Thornton continued her recitation with faultless memory.

After another couple of cantos the threatened roof went. Fortunately, the wind taking it from inside, most of it was blown clear of the house: but one of the couples collapsed skew-eyed, and was hung up on what was left of the dining-room door—within an ace of hitting John. Emily, to her intense resentment, suddenly felt cold. All at once, she found she had had enough of the storm: it had become intolerable, instead of a welcome distraction.

Mr. Thornton began to look for something to break through the floor. If only he could make a hole in it, he might get his wife and children down into the cellar. Fortunately he did not have to look far: one arm of the fallen couple had already done the work for him. Laura, Rachel, Emily, Edward and John, Mrs. Thornton, and finally Mr. Thorn-

ton himself, were passed down into the darkness already thronged with negroes and goats.

With great good sense, Mr. Thornton brought with him from the room above a couple of decanters of Madeira, and everyone had a swig, from Laura to the oldest negro. All the children made the most of this unholy chance, but somehow to Emily the bottle got passed twice, and each time she took a good pull. It was enough, at their age; and while what was left of the house was blown away over their heads, through the lull and the ensuing aerial return match, John, Emily, Edward, Rachel, and Laura, blind drunk, slept in a heap on the cellar floor: a sleep which the appalling fate of Tabby, torn to pieces by those fiends almost under their very eyes, dominated with the easy empire of nightmare.



## *Chapter Two*

ALL night the water poured through the house floor onto the people sheltering below: but (perhaps owing to the Madeira) it did them no harm. Shortly after the second bout of blowing, however, the rain stopped: and when dawn came Mr. Thornton crept out to assess the damage.

The country was quite unrecognisable, as if it had been swept by a spate. You could hardly tell, geographically speaking, where you were. It is vegetation which gives the character to a tropic landscape, not the shape of the ground: and all the vegetation, for miles, was now pulp. The ground itself had been ploughed up by instantaneous rivers, biting deep into the red earth. The only

living thing in sight was a cow: and she had lost both her horns.

The wooden part of the house was nearly all gone. After they had succeeded in reaching shelter, one wall after another had blown down. The furniture was splintered into matchwood. Even the heavy mahogany dining-table, which they loved and had always kept with its legs in little glass baths of oil to defeat the ants, was spirited right away. There were some fragments which might be part of it, or they might not: you could not tell.

Mr. Thornton returned to the cellar and helped his wife out: she was so cramped as hardly to be able to move. They knelt down together and thanked God for not having treated them any worse. Then they stood up and stared about them rather stupidly. It seemed not credible that all this had been done by a current of air. Mr. Thornton patted the atmosphere with his hand. When



make them comfortable. It was paved and unlighted: but solid.

The children were bilious for a few days, and inclined to dislike each other: but they accepted the change in their lives practically without noticing it. It is a fact that it takes experience before one can realise what is a catastrophe and what is not. Children have little faculty of distinguishing between disaster and the ordinary course of their lives. If Emily had known this was a *Hurricane*, she would doubtless have been far more impressed, for the word was full of romantic terrors. But it never entered her head: and a thunderstorm, however severe, is after all a commonplace affair. The mere fact that it had done incalculable damage, while the earthquake had done none at all, gave it no right whatever to rival the latter in the hierarchy of cataclysms: an Earthquake is a thing apart. If she was silent, and inclined to brood over some inward terror, it was not



the hurricane she was thinking of, it was the death of Tabby. That, at times, seemed a horror beyond all bearing. It was her first intimate contact with death—and a death of violence, too. The death of Old Sam had no such effect: there is after all a vast difference between a negro and a favourite cat.

There was something enjoyable, too, in camping in the hospital: a sort of everlasting picnic in which their parents for once were taking part. Indeed it led them to begin for the first time to regard their parents as rational human beings, with understandable tastes—such as sitting on the floor to eat one's dinner.

It would have surprised Mrs. Thornton very much to have been told that hitherto she had meant practically nothing to her children. She took a keen interest in Psychology (the Art Bablative, Southey calls it). She was full of theories about their upbringing which she had not time to put into effect; but





If it would have surprised the mother, it would undoubtedly have surprised the children also to be told how little their parents meant to them. Children seldom have any power of quantitative self-analysis: whatever the facts, they believe as an article of faith that they love Father and Mother first and equally. Actually, the Thornton children had loved Tabby first and foremost in all the world, some of each other second, and hardly noticed their mother's existence more than once a week. Their father they loved a little more: partly owing to the ceremony of riding home on his stirrups.

Jamaica remained, and blossomed anew, its womb being inexhaustible. Mr. and Mrs. Thornton remained, and with patience and tears tried to reconstruct things, in so far as they could be reconstructed. But the danger which their beloved little ones had been through was not a thing to risk again.





to England, they had received it as an isolated fact: thrilling in itself, but without any particular causation—for it could hardly be due to the death of the cat, and nothing else of importance had occurred lately.

The first stage of their journey was by land, to Montego Bay: and the notable thing about it was that the borrowed wagonette was drawn not by a pair of horses or a pair of mules, but by one horse and one mule. Whenever the horse wanted to go fast the mule fell asleep in the shafts: and if the driver woke it up it set off at a gallop, which angered the horse. Their progress would have been slow anyhow, as all the roads were washed away.

John was the only one who could remember England. What he remembered was sitting at the top of a flight of stairs, which was fenced off from him by a little gate, playing with a red toy milk-cart: and he knew, without having to look, that in the room on

the left Baby Emily was lying in her cot. Emily *said* she could remember something which sounded like a Prospect of the Backs of some Brick Houses at Richmond: but she might have invented it. The others had been born in the Island—Edward, only just.

They all had nevertheless most elaborate ideas about England, built up out of what their parents had told them, and from the books and old magazines they sometimes looked at. Needless to say it was a very Atlantis, a land at the back of the North Wind: and going there was about as exciting as it would be to die and go to Heaven.

John told them all about the top of the stairs for the hundredth time as they drove along; the others listening attentively (as the Believing do to a man remembering his reincarnations).

Suddenly Emily recalled sitting at a window and seeing a big bird with a beautiful tail. At the same time there had been a





supporting thick leaves: no tree has an outline because it is crushed up against something else—no *room*. In Jamaica this profusion swarms over the very mountain ranges: and even the peaks are so numerous that on the top of one you are surrounded by others, and can see nothing. There are hundreds of flowers. Then imagine all this luxuriance smashed, as with a pestle and mortar—crushed, pulped, and already growing again! Mr. Thornton and his wife were ready to shout with relief when they caught their first glimpse of the sea, and at last came out in view of the whole beautiful sweep of Montego Bay itself.

In the open sea there was a considerable swell: but within the shelter of the coral reef, with its pinhole entrance, all was still as a mirror, where three ships of different sizes lay at anchor, the whole of each beautiful machine repeated in the water under it. Within the Roads lay the Boguë Islands; and









Mrs. Thornton shuddered: but she continued bravely:

"You know, I think they were getting almost *too* devoted to us? We have been such an unrivalled centre of their lives and thoughts. It doesn't do for minds developing to be completely dependent on one person."

Captain Marpole's grizzled head emerged from the scuttle. A sea-dog: clear blue eyes of a translucent truthworthiness: a merry, wrinkled, morocco-coloured face: a rumbling voice.

"He's too good to be true," whispered Mrs. Thornton.

"Not at all! It's a sophism to imagine people don't conform to type!" barked Mr. Thornton. He felt at sixes and sevens.

Captain Marpole certainly looked the ideal Children's Captain. He would, Mrs. Thornton decided, be careful without being fussy—







and wept, "Come, too, Mother, oh, do come too!"

Honestly, it had only occurred to her that very moment that this was a *parting*.

"But think what an adventure it will be," said Mrs. Thornton bravely: "much more than if I came too!—You'll have to look after the Liddlies, just as if you were a real grown-up!"

"But I don't want any more adventures!" sobbed Emily: "I've got an *Earthquake*!"

Passions were running far too high for anyone to be aware how the final separation took place. The next thing Mrs. Thornton could remember was how tired her arm had been, after waving and waving at that dwindling speck which bore away on the land breeze, hung awhile stationary in the intervening calm, then won the Trade and climbed up into the blue.

Meanwhile, at the rail stood Margaret

~~~~~  
Fernandez, who, with her little brother Harry, was going to England by the same boat. No one had come to see them off: and the brown nurse who was accompanying them had gone below the moment she came on board, so as to be ill as quickly as possible. How handsome Mr. Bas-Thornton had looked, with his English distinction! Yet everyone knew he had no money. Her set white face was turned towards the land, her chin quivering at intervals. Slowly the harbour disappeared: the disordered profligacy of the turbulent, intricate mass of hills sank lower in the sky. The occasional white houses, and white puffs of steam and smoke from the sugar-mills, vanished. At last the land, all palely shimmering like the bloom on grapes, settled down into the mirror of emerald and blue.

She wondered whether the Thornton children would prove companionable, or a nuisance.

sance. They were all younger than she was; which was a pity.

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On the journey back to Ferndale both father and mother were silent, actuated by that tug of jealousy against sympathy which a strong common emotion begets in familiar rather than passionate companions.

They were above the ordinary sentimentalities of grass-bereavement (above choking over small shoes found in cupboards), but not above a rather strong dose of the natural instincts of parenthood, Frederic no less than his wife.

But when they were nearly home, Mrs. Thornton began to chuckle to herself:

“Funny little thing, Emily! Did you notice almost the last thing she said? She said ‘I’ve got an earthquake.’ She must have got it

two point-events differing in time and place, but not in degree of reality. *Ergo*, that first letter from England was as good as written, only not quite . . . legible yet. And the same applied to seeing them. (But here one must stop, for the same argument applied to old age and death, it wouldn't do.)

Yet, a bare fortnight after the arrival of this first budget, still another letter arrived, from Havana. The *Clorinda* had put in there unexpectedly, it appeared: the letter was from Captain Marpole.

"What a dear man he is," said Alice. "He must have known how anxious we would be for every scrap of news."

Captain Marpole's letter was not so terse and vivid as the children's had been; still, for the news it contained, I give it in full:

HAVANA DE CUBA

HONoured SIR AND MADAM,

I hasten to write to you to relieve you of any uncertainty!



After leaving the Caymans we stood for the Leeward Passage, and sighted the Isle of Pines and False Cape on the morning of the 19th and Cape S. Antonio in the evening, but were prevented from rounding the same by a true Norther, the first of the season, on the 22nd, however, the wind coming round sufficiently we rounded the cape in a lively fashion and stood N $\frac{1}{2}$ E well away from the Coloradoes which are a dangerous reef lying off this part of the Cuban coast. At six o'clock on the morning of the 23rd there being light airs only I sighted three sail in the North East, evidently merchantmen bound on the same course as ourselves, at the same time a schooner of similar character was observed standing out towards us from the direction of Black Key, and I pointed her out to my mate just before going below, having the wind of us he was within hailing distance by ten in the morning, judge then of our astonishment when he rudely opened ten or twelve disguised gun-ports and unmasked a whole broadside of artillery trained upon us, ordering us at the same time in the most peremptory manner to heave-to or he would sink us instantly. There was nothing to do but to comply

the poor Locket in which I was used to carry the portrait of my Wife, and no appeal to his sensibility, tho' I shed tears, would make him return this to him worthless object, he also tore down and carried away the cabin bell-pulls, which could be of no possible use to him and was an act of the most open *piracy*, at length, seeing I was obdurate, he threatened to blow up the ship *and all in it* if I would not yield, he prepared the train and would have proceeded to carry out this devilish threat if I had not in this last extremity, consented.

I come now to the latter part of my tale. The children had taken refuge in the deck-house and had been up to now free from harm, except for a cuff or two and the Degrading Sights they must have witnessed, but no sooner was the specie some five thousand pounds in all mostly my private property and most of our cargo (chiefly rum sugar coffee and arrowroot) removed to the schooner than her captain, in sheer infamous wantonness, had them all brought out from their refuge your own little ones and the two Fernandez children who were also on board and murdered them, every one. That anything so wicked should look



Chapter Three

THE passage from Montego Bay to the Caymans, where the children had written their letters, is only a matter of a few hours: indeed, in clear weather one can look right across from Jamaica to the peak of Tarquinio in Cuba.

There is no harbour: and the anchorage, owing to the reefs and ledges, is difficult. The *Clorinda* brought up off the Grand Cayman, the look-out man in the chains feeling his way to a white, sandy patch of bottom which affords the only safe resting-place there: and causing the anchor to be let go to windward of it. Luckily, the weather was fine.

The island, a longish one at the western

on the loins. There were also a great many snakes, including a kind of boa.

The current off the Isle of Pines sets strongly to the east: so the *Clorinda* kept close inshore, to cheat it. They passed Cape Corrientes—looking, when first sighted, like two hummocks in the sea: they passed Holandes Point, known as False Cape San Antonio: but were prevented for some time, as Captain Marpole told in his letter, from rounding the true one. For to attempt Cape San Antonio in a Norther is to waste your labour.

They lay-to in sight of that long, low, rocky, treeless promontory in which the great island of Cuba terminates, and waited. They were so close that the fisherman's hut on its southern side was clearly discernible.

For the children, those first few days at sea had flashed by like a kind of prolonged circus. There is no machine invented for sober purposes so well adapted also to play

difficult to navigate: and beyond that again the Coloradoes Reef begins, the first of a long chain of reefs following the coast in a northeasterly direction as far as Honde Bay, two-thirds the way to Havana. Within these reefs lies the intricate Canal de Guaniguanico (of which this channel is the westernmost outlet) with its own rather dubious little ports. But ocean traffic, needless to say, shuns the whole box of tricks: and the *Clorinda* advisedly stood well away to the northward, keeping her course at a gentle amble for the open Atlantic.

John was sitting outside the galley with the sailor called Curtis, who was instructing him in the neat mystery of a Turk's-head. Young Henry Marpole was steering. Emily was messing around—not talking, just being by him.

As for the other sailors, they were all congregated in a ring, up in the bows, so that one saw nothing but their backs. But every now

and then a general guffaw, and a sudden surging of the whole group, showed they were up to something or other.

John presently tip-toed forward, to see what it might be. He thrust his bullet-head among their legs, and worked his way in till he had as good a view as the earliest comer.

He found they had got the old monkey, and were filling him up with rum. First they gave him biscuit soaked in it: then they dipped rags in a pannikin of the stuff, and squeezed them into his mouth. Then they tried to make him drink direct; but that he would not do—it only wasted a lot of spirit.

John felt a vague horror at all this: though of course he did not guess the purpose behind it.

The poor brute shivered and chattered. He rolled his eyes, spluttered. I suppose it must have been an excruciatingly funny sight. Every now and then he would seem altogether overcome by the spirit. Then one of

one could see of the animal: and out of the corner of his eye he could see at the same time the uproarious operators, the tar-stained knife.

But the moment the blade touched flesh, with an awful screech the mommet contrived to fling off his cage—leapt on the surgeon's head—leapt from there high in the air—caught the forestay—and in a twinkling was away and up high in the fore-rigging.

Then began the hue and cry. Sixteen men flinging about in lofty acrobatics, all to catch one poor old drunk monkey. For he was drunk as a lord, and sick as a cat. His course varied between wild and hair-raising leaps (a sort of inspired gymnastics), and doleful incompetent reelings on a taut rope which threatened at every moment to catapult him into the sea. But even so they could never quite catch him.

No wonder that all the children, now, stood open-mouthed and open-eyed on the

its middle, with no final tableau. The sailors began, in twos and threes, to slide to the deck.

But the visitors were already on board.

That is how the *Clorinda* really was taken. There was no display of artillery—but then, Captain Marpole could hardly know this, seeing he was below in his bunk at the time. Henry was steering by that sixth sense which only comes into operation when the other five are asleep. The mate and crew had been so intent on what they were doing, that the *Flying Dutchman* himself might have laid alongside, for all they cared.

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Indeed, the whole manoeuvre was executed so quietly that Captain Marpole never even woke—incredible though this will seem to a seaman. But then, Marpole had begun life as a successful coal merchant.



The mate and crew were bundled into the fo'c'sle (the fox-hole, the children thought it was called), and confined there, the scuttle being secured with a couple of nails.

The children themselves were shepherded, as related, into the deck-house, where the chairs, and perfectly useless pieces of old rope, and broken tools, and dried-up paint-pots were kept, without taking alarm. But the door was immediately shut on them. They had to wait for hours and hours before anything else happened—nearly all day, in fact: and they got very bored, and rather cross.

The actual number of the men who had effected the capture cannot have been more than eight or nine, most of them "women" at that, and not armed—at least with any visible weapon. But a second boatload soon followed them from the schooner. These, for form's sake, were armed with muskets. But there was no possible resistance to fear.

Two long nails through the scuttle can secure any number of men pretty effectually.

With this second boatload came both the captain and the mate. The former was a clumsy great fellow, with a sad, silly face. He was bulky; yet so ill-proportioned one got no impression of power. He was modestly dressed in a drab shore-going suit: he was newly shaven, and his sparse hair was pomaded so that it lay in a few dark ribbons across his baldish head-top. But all this shore-decency of appearance only accentuated his big splodgy brown hands, stained and scarred and corned with his calling. Moreover, instead of boots he wore a pair of gigantic heel-less slippers in the Moorish manner, which he must have sliced with a knife out of some pair of dead sea-boots. Even his great spreading feet could hardly keep them on, so that he was obliged to walk at the slowest of shuffles, flop-flop along the deck. He stooped, as if always afraid of banging

first at him and then at the much be-painted faces of the "ladies" pressed against his cabin skylight.

"Who the devil are you?" he contrived to ask at last.

"I hold a commission in the Columbian navy," the stranger explained: "and I am in need of a few stores."

(Meanwhile his men had the hatches off, and were preparing to help themselves to everything in the ship.)

Marpole looked him up and down. It was barely conceivable that even the Columbian navy should have such a figure of an officer. Then his eye wandered back to the skylight.

"If you call yourself a man-of-war, Sir, who in Heaven's name are *those*?" As he pointed, the smirking faces hastily retreated.

The stranger blushed.

"They are rather difficult to explain," he admitted ingenuously.

"If you had said *Turkish* navy, that would



Still Jonsen made no reply: though the bored expression of his mate was lit up for a moment by a smile.

"You'll pay me in *cash*!" Marpole concluded. Then he went off on a fresh tack: "Though how the devil you got on board without my being called beats me! Where's my mate?"

Jonsen began in a toneless voice, as if by rote: "I will write you an order for five thousand pounds: three thousand for the stores, and two thousand you will give me in money."

"We know you've got specie on board," interjected the little fair mate, speaking for the first time.

"Our information is certain!" declared Jonsen.

Marpole at last went white and began to sweat. It took even Fear an extraordinarily long time to penetrate his thick skull. But he denied that he had any treasure on board.



Marpole had no inkling of what was afoot. The mate went on deck to prepare his plan, whatever it was: and Jonsen busied himself with a last futile search for the hiding-place, in silence.

Presently the mate shouted down to him, and he ordered Marpole on deck.

Poor Marpole groaned. Unloading cargo is inclined to be a messy business anyway: but these visitors had been none too careful. There is no smell in the world worse than when molasses and bilge-water marry: now it was let loose like ten thousand devils. His heart almost broke when he saw the havoc that had been made with the cargo: broken cases, casks, bottles, all about the deck: everything in the greatest confusion: tarpaulins cut to pieces: hatches broken.

From the deck-house came the piercing voice of Laura:

"I want to come out!"

The Spanish ladies seemed to have re-



The second row of holes can only have missed the taller children by a few inches.

There was a moment's silence: then a sudden wild shriek from within the deck-house. It was so terrified a sound not their own mothers could have told which throat it came from. One only, though.

The stranger-captain had been slouching about in an agitated way: but at that shriek he turned on Marpole, his face purple with a sudden fury:

"Now will you say?"

But Marpole was now completely master of himself. He did not hesitate:

"NO!"

"Next time he gives the order it will be to shoot right through their little bodies!"

So that was what Marpole had meant in his letter by "*every possible threat which villainy could devise*"!

But even by this he was not to be daunted:

"No, I tell you!"



Heroic obstinacy!

But instead of giving the fatal order, Jon-
sen lifted a paw like a bear's, and banged
Marpole's jaw with it. The latter fell to the
deck, stunned.

It was then they took the children out of
the deck-house.

They were not really much frightened: ex-
cept Margaret, who did seem to be taking it
all to heart rather. Being shot at is so unlike
what one expects it to be that one can hardly
connect the two ideas enough to have the ap-
propriate emotions, the first few times. It is
not half so startling as someone jumping out
on you with a "*Boo!*" in the dark, for
instance. The boys were crying a little: the
girls were hot and cross and hungry.

"What were you doing?" Rachel asked,
brightly, of one of the firing-party.

But only the captain and the mate could
speak English. The latter, ignoring Rachel's

question, explained that they were all to go on board the schooner—"to have some supper," he said.

He had all a sailor's reassuring charm of manner. Under the charge of two Spanish seamen they were helped over the bulwarks onto the smaller vessel, which was just casting off.

There the strange sailors broke open a whole case of crystallised fruits, on which they might turn the edge of their long appetites as much as they would.

When poor stunned Captain Marpole came to his senses, it was to find himself tied to the mainmast. Several handfuls of shavings and splintered wood were piled round his feet, and Jonsen was sprinkling them plentifully with gun-powder—though not perhaps enough, it is true, to "blow up the ship and all in it."

The small fair mate stood at hand in the



I suppose it was the lack of a common language which first generated the infection. The Spanish sailors, used enough to this difficulty, grinned, pointed, and bobbed: but the children retired into a display of good manners which it would certainly have surprised their parents to see. Whereon the sailors became equally formal: and one poor monkeyfied little fellow who by nature belched continually was so be-nudged and be-winked by his companions, and so covered in confusion of his own accord, that presently he went away to eat by himself. Even then, so silent was this revel, he could still be heard faintly belching, half the ship's length away.

Perhaps it would have gone better if the captain and mate had been there, with their English. But they were too busy, looking over the personal belongings they had brought from the barque, sorting out by the light of a lantern anything too easily identifiable and reluctantly committing it to the sea.



It was at the loud splashes made by a couple of empty trunks, stamped in large letters JAS MARPOLE, that they heard a roar of unassumed indignation arise from the neighbouring barque. The two paused in their work, astonished: why should a crew already spoiled of all they possessed take it so hardly, when one heaved a couple of old worthless trunks into the sea?

It was inexplicable.

They continued their task, taking no further notice of the *Clorinda*.

Once supper was over, the social situation became even more awkward. The children stood about, not knowing what to do with their hands, or even their legs: unable to talk to their hosts, and feeling it would be rude to talk to one another: wishing badly that it was time to leave. If only it had been light they could have been happy enough exploring: but in the darkness there was nothing to do, nothing whatever.



To pursue her, right in the track of shipping, was out of the question. Jonsen had to content himself with staring after her through his night-glass.

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Captain Jonsen set the little monkeyfied sailor, who had been so mortified earlier in the evening, to clear the schooner's fore-hold. The warps and brooms and fenders it contained were piled to one side, and a sufficiency of bedclothes for the guests was provided from the plunder.

But nothing could now thaw them. They clambered down the ladder and received their blanket apiece in an uncomfortable silence. Jonsen hung about, anxious to be helpful in this matter of getting into beds which were not there, but not knowing how to set about it. So he gave it up at last, and



EDWARD: I smell cockroaches.

EMILY: Sh!

EDWARD (*loudly and hopefully*): They'll bite our nails off, because we haven't washed, and our skin, and our hair, and ——

LAURA: There's a cockroach in my bed! Get out!

(*You could hear the brute go zooming away. But LAURA was already out too.*)

EMILY: Laura! Go back to bed!

LAURA: I can't when there's a cockroach in it!

JOHN: Get into bed again, you little fool! He's gone long ago!

LAURA: But I expect he has left his wife.

HARRY: They don't have wives, they're wives themselves.

RACHEL: Ow! Laura, stop it! Emily, Laura's walking on me!

EMILY: Lau-rer!

LAURA: Well, I must walk on something!

EMILY: Go to sleep!



(Silence for a while.)

LAURA: I haven't said my prayers.

EMILY: Well, say them lying down.

RACHEL: She mustn't, that's lazy.

JOHN: Shut up, Rachel, she must.

RACHEL: It's wicked! You go to sleep in the middle, then. People who go to sleep in the middle ought to be damned, they ought. Oughtn't they? *(Silence.)* Oughtn't they? *(Still silence.)* Emily, I say, oughtn't they?

JOHN: No!

RACHEL *(dreamily)*: I think there's lots more people ought to be damned than are.

(Silence again.)

HARRY: Marghie. *(Silence.)* Marghie! *(Silence.)*

JOHN: What's up with Marghie? Won't she speak?

(A faint sob is heard.)

HARRY: I don't know.

(Another sob.)

JOHN: Is she often like this?



HARRY: She's an awful ass sometimes.

JOHN: Marghie, what's up?

MARGARET (*miserably*): Let me alone!

RACHEL: I believe she's frightened!
(*Chants tauntingly.*) Marghie's got the bogies, the bogies, the bogies!

MARGARET (*sobbing out loud*): Oh you little fools!

JOHN: Well, what's the matter with you, then?

MARGARET (*after a pause*): I'm older than any of you.

JOHN: Well, *that's* a funny reason to be frightened!

MARGARET: It isn't.

JOHN: It is!

MARGARET (*warming to the argument*): It isn't, I tell you!

JOHN: *It is!*

MARGARET (*smugly*): That's simply because you're all too young to know. . . .

JOHN: Oh, hit her, Emily!



EMILY (*sleepily*): Hit her yourself.

HARRY: But Marghie, why are we here?
(*No answer.*) Emily, why are we here?

EMILY (*indifferently*): I don't know. I expect they just wanted to change us.

HARRY: I expect so. But they never *told* us we were going to be changed.

EMILY: Grown-ups never *do* tell us things.



Chapter Four

THE children all slept late, and all woke at the same moment as if by clockwork. They sat up, and yawned uniformly, and stretched the stiffness out of their legs and backs (they were lying on solid wood, remember).

The schooner was steady, and people tramping about the deck. The main-hold and fore-hold were all one: and from where they were they could see the main-hatch had been opened. The captain appeared through it legs first, and dropped onto the higgledy-piggledy of the *Clorinda's* cargo.

For some time they simply stared at him. He looked uneasy, and was talking to himself as he tapped now this case with his pencil,

now that: and presently shouted rather fiercely to people on deck.

"All right, all right," came from above the injured voice of the mate. "There's no such hurry as all that."

On which the captain's mutterings to himself swelled, as if ten people were conversing at once in his chest.

"May we get up yet?" asked Rachel.

Captain Jonsen spun round—he had forgotten their existence.

"Eh?"

"May we get up, please?"

"You can go to the debble." He muttered this so low the children did not hear it. But it was not lost on the mate.

"Hey! Ey! Ey!" he called down, reprov-
ingly.

"Yes! Get up! Go on deck! Here!"
The captain viciously set up a short ladder for them to climb through the hatch.

They were greatly astonished to find the



"But what for?"

He looked at her in surprise: "Why, those are the 'ladies' we had on board, to look like passengers. You didn't think they were real ladies, did you?"

"What, were they dressed up?" asked Emily excitedly: "What fun!"

"I like dressing up," said Laura.

"I don't," said Rachel, "I think it's babyish."

"I thought they were real ladies," admitted Emily.

"We're a respectable ship's crew, we are," said the mate, a trifle stiffly—and without too good logic, when you come to think of it. "Here, you go on shore and amuse yourselves."

So the children went ashore, holding hands in a long row, and promenaded the town in a formal sort of way. Laura wanted to go off by herself, but the others would not let her: and when they returned the line was still

unbroken. They had seen all there was to see, and no one had taken the least notice of them (so far as they were aware), and they wanted to start asking questions again.

It was, then, a charming little sleepy old place, in its way, Santa Lucia: isolated on the forgotten western end of Cuba between Nombre de Dios and the Rio de Puercos: cut off from the open sea by the intricate nature of the channels through the reefs and the banks of Isabella, channels only navigable to the practised and creeping local coasting craft and shunned like poison by bigger traffic: on land isolated by a hundred miles of forest from Havana.

Time was, these little ports of the Canal de Guaniguanico had been pretty prosperous, as bases for pirates: but it was a fleeting prosperity. There came the heroic attack of an American squadron under Captain Allen, in 1823, on the Bay of Sejuapo, their headquarters. From that blow (although it took many

years to take full effect) the industry never really recovered: it dwindled and dwindled, like hand-weaving. One could make money much faster in a city like Havana, and with less risk (if less respectably). Piracy had long since ceased to pay, and should have been scrapped years ago: but a vocational tradition will last on a long time after it has ceased to be economic, in a decadent form. Now, Santa Lucia—and piracy—continued to exist because they always had; but for no other reason. Such a haul as the *Clorinda* did not come once in a blue moon. Every year the amount of land under cultivation dwindled, and the pirate schooners were abandoned to rot against the wharves, or ignominiously sold as traders. The young men left for Havana or the United States. The maidens yawned. The local grandees increased in dignity as their numbers and property dwindled: an idyllic, simple-minded

country community, oblivious of the outer world and of its own approaching oblivion.

"I don't think I should like to live here," John decided, when they got back to the ship.

Meanwhile the cargo had been unloaded onto the quay: and after the siesta a crowd of about a hundred people gathered round, poking and discussing. The auction was about to begin. Captain Jonsen tramped about rather in the way of everybody, but especially annoying the mate by shouting contrary directions every minute. The latter had a ledger, and a number of labels with numbers on them which he was pasting onto the various bales and packages. The sailors were building a kind of temporary stage—the thing was to be done in style.

Every moment the crowd increased. Because they all talked Spanish it was a pantomime to the children: like puppets acting, not like real people moving and talking. So they discovered what a fascinating game it is to



THE AUCTION

denly refused to know, a single word of Spanish: so the auctioneering devolved on the mate. The latter mounted the stage; and with a great assumption of competence, began.

But auctioneering is an art: it is as easy to write a sonnet in a foreign tongue as to conduct a successful auction. One must have at one's command eloquence without a hitch: the faculty of kindling an audience, amusing them, castigating them, converting them, till they rattle out increments as a camp-meeting rattles out Amens: till they totally forget the worth (and even the nature) of the lot, and begin to take a real pride in a long run of bidding—as a champion does in a long break at billiards.

The little Viennese had been to a good school, it is true: for he had once resided in Wales, where one sees auctioneering in its finest flower. In Welsh, or English, or even in his native tongue, he could have acquitted

rejoined in Spanish even more stinging-ly. He stumped off in a sulk: they could all conduct his affairs without him, if they weren't prepared to treat him with a little consid-eration.

But who would be less partial? The mate, angry, maintained that to elect one of the buyers was equally objectionable.

Thereon an earthquake began in the fat old lady, and gradually gathered enough force to lift her onto her feet. She took John by the shoulders, and pushed him before her to the scales. Then in a few witty, ringing words she suggested her solution—*he* should do the weighing.

The audience were pleased: but as soon as John understood he went very red, and wanted to escape. The rest of the children, on the other hand, were eaten with envy.

"Mayn't I help too?" piped Rachel.

The despairing mate thought he saw just a forlorn hope in this. While John was being



Captain Jonsen, however, had his own idea of how to enliven a parochial bazaar that is proving a frost. He went on board, and mixed several gallons of that potion known in alcoholic circles as Hangman's Blood (which is compounded of rum, gin, brandy, and porter). Innocent (merely beery) as it looks, refreshing as its tastes, it has the property of increasing rather than allaying thirst, and so, once it has made a breach, soon demolishes the whole fort.

This he poured out into mugs, merely remarking that it was a noted English cordial, and gave it to the children to distribute among the crowd.

At once the Cubans began to show more interest in them than when they came bearing samples of arrow-root; and with their popularity their happiness increased, and like rococo Ganymedekins and Hebelettes they darted about the crowd, distributing the enticing poison to all who would.

When he saw what was on foot, the mate wiped his mouth in despair.

"*Oh* you fool!" he groaned.

But the captain himself was highly pleased with his ruse: kept rubbing his hands, and grinning, and winking.

"That'll liven 'em, eh?"

"Wait and see!" was all the mate let himself say. "You just wait and see!"

"Look at Edward!" said Emily to Margaret in a pause. "It's perfectly sickening!"

It was. The very first mug rendered the fat señora even more motherly. Edward by now was fascinated, was in her power completely. He sat and gazed up in her little black eyes, his own large brown ones glazed with sentiment. He avoided her moustache, it is true: but on her cheek he was returning her kisses earnestly. All this, of course, without the possibility of their exchanging a single word—pure instinct. “With a fork drive Nature

out . . ." one would gladly have taken a fork to Nature, on that occasion.

Meanwhile, on the rest of the crowd the liquor was having exactly the effect the mate had foreseen. Instead of stimulating them, it dissolved completely whatever vestiges of attention they were still giving to the sale. He stepped down from the platform—gave it all up in despair. For they had now broken up into little groups, which discussed and argued their own affairs as if they were in a café. He in his turn went on board, and shut himself in his cabin—Captain Jonsen could deal with the mess he had made himself!

But alas! No worse host than Jonsen was ever born: he was utterly incapable of either understanding or controlling a crowd. All he could think of to do was to ply them with more.

For the children, the spectacle was an absorbing one. The whole nature of these people, as they drank, seemed to be changing:

throned lady, spread a handkerchief over his face, and went to sleep: three other middle-aged men, holding each other with one hand to establish contact and using the other for emphasis, kept up a continuous clacking talk, that faltered intolerably though never quite stopping—like a very old engine.

A dog ran in and out among them all wagging its tail, but no one kicked it. Presently it found the old gentleman who was asleep on the ground, and began licking his ear excitedly: it had never had such a chance before.

The old lady also had fallen asleep, a little crookedly—she might even have slipped off her chair if her negro had not buttressed her up. Edward got off her, and went and joined the other children rather shamefacedly: but they would not speak to him.

Jonsen looked round him perplexedly. Why had Otto abandoned the sale, now the crowd were all primed and ready? Prob-

ably he had some good reason, though. He was an incomprehensible man, that mate: but clever.

The truth is that Captain Jonsen was himself a man with a very weak head for liquor, and so he very seldom touched it, and knew little of the subtler aspects of its effects.

He paced up and down the dusty wharf at his usual slow shuffle, his head sunk forward in wretchedness, occasionally wringing his hands in the naturalest way, and even whimpering. When the priest came up to him confidentially and offered him a price for all that remained unsold he simply shook his head and continued his shuffle.

There was something a little nightmare-like in the whole scene which riveted the children's attention, and was very near the border of frightening them. It was with something of a struggle that at last Margaret said "Let's go on the ship." So they all went


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In the morning they might easily have thought the whole thing a dream, if John's bed had not been so puzzlingly empty.

Yet, as if by some mute flash of understanding, no one commented on his absence. No one questioned Margaret, and she offered no information. Neither then nor thereafter was his name ever mentioned by anybody: and if you had known the children intimately you would never have guessed from them that he had ever existed.

## 111

The children's only enemy on board the schooner (which presently put to sea again, with them still on board) was the big white pig. (There was a little black fellow, too.)

He was a pig with no decision of mind. He could never choose a place to lie for himself; but was so ready to follow anyone else's opin-



one morning, Jonsen sent a boat on shore to get water.

The heat was extreme. The ropes hung like dead snakes, the sails as heavy as ill-sculptured drapery. The iron stanchion of the awning blistered any hand that touched it. Where the deck was unsheltered, the pitch boiled out of the seams. The children lay gasping together in the small shade, the little black pig squealing anxiously till he found a comfortable stomach to settle down on.

The big white pig had not found them yet.

From the silent shore came an occasional gun-shot. The water-party were potting pigeons. The sea was like a smooth pampas of quick-silver: so steady you could not split shore from reflection, till the casual collision of a pelican broke the phantom. The crew were mending sails, under the awning, with infinite slowness: all except one negro, who straddled the bowsprit in his trousers, admir-

ing his own grin in the mirror beneath. The sun lit an iridescent glimmer on his shoulders: in such a light even a negro could not be black.

Emily was missing John badly: but the little black pig snuffled in supreme content, his snout buried amicably in her arm-pit.

When the boat-load returned, they had other game besides pigeons and grey land-crabs. They had stolen a goat from some lonely fisherman.

It was just as they came up over the side that the big white pig discovered the party under the awning, and prepared for the attack. But the goat at that moment bounded nimbly from the bulwarks: and without even stopping to look round, swallowed his chin and charged. He caught the old pig full in the ribs, knocking his wind out completely.

Then the battle began. The goat charged, the pig screamed and hustled. Each time the goat arrived at him the pig yelled as if he was







## *Chapter Five*

WHEN Destiny knocks the first nail in the coffin of a tyrant, it is seldom long before she knocks the last.

It was the very next morning that the schooner, in the lightest of airs, was sidling gently to leeward. The mate was at the wheel, shifting his weight from foot to foot with that rhythmic motion many steersmen affect, the better to get the feel of a finnickier helm; and Edward was teaching the Captain's terrier to beg, on the cabin-top. The mate shouted to him to hang on to something.

"Why?" said Edward.

"*Hang on!*" cried the mate again, spinning the wheel over as fast as he could to bring her into the wind.





The howling squall took her, through his promptness, almost straight in the nose; or it would have carried all away. Edward clung to the skylight. The terrier skidded about alarmedly all over the cabin-top, slipped off onto the deck, and was kicked by a dashing sailor clean through the galley door. But not so that poor big pig, who was taking an airing on deck at the time. Overboard he went, and vanished to windward, his snout (sometimes) sticking up manfully out of the water. God, Who had sent him the goat and the monkey for a sign, now required his soul of him. Overboard, too, went the coops of fowls, three new-washed shirts, and—of all strange things to get washed away—the grindstone.

Up out of his cabin appeared the Captain's shapeless brown head, cursing the mate as if it was *he* who had upset the apple-cart. He came up without his boots, in grey wool socks, and his braces hanging down his back.











time acutely miserable, was still at the wheel. The mate had shaved himself and put on shore clothes, as a parable: he now appeared on deck: pretended not to see the captain, but strolled like a passenger up to the children and entered into conversation with them.

"If I'm not fit to steer in foul weather, I'm not fit to steer in fair!" he muttered, but without glancing at the captain. "He can take the helm all day and night, for all the help I'll give him!"

The captain appeared equally not to see the mate. He looked quite ready to take both watches till kingdom come.

"If *he*'d been at the wheel when that squall struck us," said the mate under his voice but with biting passion, "he'd have lost the ship! He's no more eye for a squall coming than a sucker-fish! And he knows it, too: that's what makes him go on this way!"

The children did not answer. It shocked them deeply to have to see a grown-up, a





“No, what?” asked Margaret, with an eagerness that even exceeded the necessities of politeness in its falsity.

"She was built on the Clyde, and sailed over. (Nobody thought of using steam for a long ocean voyage in those days.) The Company thought they ought to make a to-do—to popularise her, so to speak. So the first time she put to sea under her own power, they invited all the big-wigs on board: all the Members of Assembly in Trinidad, and the Governor and his staff, and a Bishop. It was the Bishop what did the trick."

His story died out: he became completely absorbed in watching sidelong the effect of his bravado on the captain.

"Did what?" asked Margaret.

"Ran 'em aground."

"But what did they let him steer for?" asked Edward: "They might have known he couldn't!"

"Edward! How dare you talk about a



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didn't: started growing cocoa-nuts. But there was one poor fish was in such a hurry he broke his leg, and they came ashore and found him. When he saw the Bishop coming for him he started yelling out it was the Devil."

"O-oh!" gasped Rachel, horror-struck.

"How silly of him," said Edward.

"I don't know so much!" said the mate.

"He wasn't too far wrong! Ever since that, they've been the death of our profession, Steam and the Church . . . what with steaming, and what with preaching, and steaming and preaching. . . . Now that's a funny thing," he broke off, suddenly interested by what he was saying: "*Steam* and the *Church*! What have they got in common, eh? Nothing, you'd say: you'd think they'd fight each other cat-and-dog: but no: they're thick as two thieves . . . thick as thieves.—Not like in the days of Parson Audain."

"Who was he?" asked Margaret helpfully.

shot them both, and Christophe threatened to hang him if they died. But the parson (having little faith in Domingan doctors) escaped by night in an open boat and went to St. Eustatius. There he found many religions but no ministers; so he recommenced clergyman of every kind: in the morning he celebrated a mass for the Catholics, then a Lutheran service in Dutch, then Church of England matins: in the evening he sang hymns and preached hell-fire to the Methodists. Meanwhile his wife, who had more tranquil tastes lived at Bristol: so he now married a Dutch widow, resourcefully conducting the ceremony himself.

"But I *don't* understand!" said Emily despairingly: "Was he a real clergyman?"

"Of course he wasn't," said Margaret.

"But he couldn't have married himself *himself* if he wasn't," argued Edward: "Could he?"

The mate heaved a sigh.

gotten what the course was, but had been simply steering by the wind, and there was now no wind to steer by, he (the steersman) concluded the wheel could get on very well without him.

The reconciliation of the Captain and the mate deserved to be celebrated by all hands with a blind.

A rum-cask was broached; and the common sailors were soon as unconscious as their betters.

Altogether this was one of the unpleasantest days the children had spent in their lives.

When dawn came, everyone was still pretty incapable, and the neglected vessel drooped uncertainly. Jonsen, still rather unsteady on his feet, his head aching and his mind Napoleonic but muddled, came on deck and looked about him. The sun had come up like a searchlight; but it was about all there was to be seen. No land was anywhere in sight, and the sea and sky seemed

compass through the hours of darkness, without catching sight of her. When morning came, all hands crowded expectantly at the rail.

But the brig was vanished. The sea was as bare as an egg.

If they were lost before, now they were double-lost. Jonsen did not know where he might be within two hundred miles; and being no sextant-man, but an incurable dead-reckoner, he had no means of finding out. This did not worry him very greatly, however, because sooner or later one of two things might happen: he might catch sight of some bit of land he recognised, or he might capture some vessel better informed than himself. Meanwhile, since he had no particular destination, one bit of sea was much the same to him as another.

The piece he was wandering in, however, was evidently out of the main track of shipping; for days went by, and weeks, without

his coming even so near to effecting a capture as he had been in the case of the brig.

But Captain Jonsen was not sorry to be out of the public eye for a while. Before he had left Santa Lucia, news had reached him of the *Clorinda* putting in to Havana, and of the fantastic tale Marpole was telling. The "twelve masked gun-ports" had amused him hugely, since he was altogether without artillery; but when he heard Marpole accused him of murdering the children—Marpole, that least reputable of skunks—his anger had broken out in one of its sudden explosions. For it was unthinkable—during those first few days—that he would ever touch a hair of their heads, or even speak a cross word to them. They were still a sort of holy novelty, then; it was not till their shyness had worn off that he had begun to regret so whole-heartedly the failure of his attempt to leave them behind with the Chief Magistrate's wife.



Chapter Six

THE weeks passed in aimless wandering. For the children, the lapse of time acquired once more the texture of a dream: things ceased happening: every inch of the schooner was now as familiar to them as the *Clorinda* had been, or Ferndale: they settled down quietly to grow, as they had done at Ferndale, and as they would have done, had there been time, on the *Clorinda*.

And then an event did occur, to Emily, of considerable importance. She suddenly realised who she was.

There is little reason that one can see why it should not have happened to her five years earlier, or even five later; and none, why it should have come that particular afternoon.



She had been playing houses in a nook right in the bows, behind the windlass (on which she had hung a devil's-claw as a door-knocker); and tiring of it was walking rather aimlessly aft, thinking vaguely about some bees and a fairy queen, when it suddenly flashed into her mind that she was *she*.

She stopped dead, and began looking over all of her person which came within the range of her eyes. She could not see much, except a fore-shortened view of the front of her frock, and her hands when she lifted them for inspection; but it was enough for her to form a rough idea of the little body she suddenly realised to be hers.

She began to laugh, rather mockingly. "Well!" she thought, in effect: "Fancy *you*, of all people, going and getting caught like this!—You can't get out of it now, not for a very long time: you'll have to go through with being a child, and growing up, and

had been left vague, as much taken for granted as her own. Wasn't she perhaps God, herself? Was it that she was trying to remember? However, the more she tried, the more it eluded her. (How absurd, to disremember such an important point as whether one was God or not!) So she let it slide: perhaps it would come back to her later.

Secondly, why had all this not occurred to her before? She had been alive for over ten years, now, and it had never once entered her head. She felt like a man who suddenly remembers at eleven o'clock at night, sitting in his own arm-chair, that he had accepted an invitation to go out to dinner that night. There is no reason for him to remember it now: but there seems equally little why he should not have remembered it in time to keep his engagement. How could he have sat there all the evening, without being disturbed by the slightest misgiving? How could Emily



It implied a whole series of circumstances. In the first place, there was her family, a number of brothers and sisters from whom, before, she had never entirely dissociated herself; but now she got such a sudden feeling of being a discrete person that they seemed as separate from her as the ship itself. However, willy-nilly she was almost as tied to them as she was to her body. And then there was this voyage, this ship, this mast round which she had wound her legs. She began to examine it with almost as vivid an illumination as she had studied the skin of her hands. And when she came down from the mast, what would she find at the bottom? There would be Jonsen, and Otto, and the crew: the whole fabric of a daily life which up to now she had accepted as it came, but which now seemed vaguely disquieting. What was going to happen? Were there disasters running about loose, disasters which



Down below on the deck the smaller children were repeatedly crowding themselves into a huge coil of rope, feigning sleep and then suddenly leaping out with yelps of panic and dancing round it in consternation and dismay. Emily watched them with that impersonal attention one gives to a kaleidoscope. Presently Harry spied her, and gave a hail.

"Emilee-ee! Come down and play House-on-fire!"

At that, her normal interests momentarily revived. Her stomach as it were leaped within her sympathetically toward the game. But it died in her as suddenly: and not only died, but she did not even feel disposed to waste her noble voice on them. She continued to stare without making any reply whatever.

"Come on!" shouted Edward.

"Come and play!" shouted Laura. "Don't be a pig!"



Then in the ensuing stillness Rachel's voice floated up:

"Don't call her, Laura, we don't really want her."

ii

But Emily was completely unaffected—only glad that for the present they were all right by themselves. She was already beginning to feel the charge of the party a burden.

It had automatically devolved on her with the defection of Margaret.

It was puzzling, this Margaret business. She could not understand it, and it disturbed her. It dated back really to that night, about a week ago, when she herself had so unaccountably bitten the captain. The memory of her own extraordinary behaviour gave her now quite a little shiver of alarm.

Everybody had been very drunk that night,

stupidly frightened Margaret had been the very first night on the schooner.

At that moment Jonsen had staggered up to Emily, and putting one hand under her chin had begun to stroke her hair with the other. A sort of blind vertigo seized her: she caught his thumb and bit it as hard as she could: then, terrified at her own madness, dashed across the hold to where the other children were gathered in a wondering knot.

"What *have* you done!" cried Laura, pushing her away angrily: "Oh you wicked girl, you've hurt him!"

Jonsen was stamping about, swearing and sucking his thumb. Edward had produced a handkerchief, and between them all they had managed to tie it up. He stood staring at the bandaged member for a few moments; shook his head like a wet retriever and retreated on deck, dang-dangling under his breath. Margaret had then been so ill they thought she

curious way Margaret had gone on, the next few days.

For some time she had behaved very oddly indeed. At first she seemed exaggeratedly frightened of all the men: but then she had suddenly taken to following them about the deck like a dog—not Jonsen, it is true, but Otto especially. Then suddenly she had departed from them altogether, and taken up her quarters in the cabin.

The curious thing was that now she avoided them all utterly, and spent all her time with the sailors: and the sailors, for their part, seemed to take peculiar pains not only not to let her speak to, but even not to let her be seen by the other children.

Now, they hardly saw her at all: and when they did she seemed so different they hardly recognised her: though where the difference lay it would be hard to say.

Emily, from her perch at the masthead, could just see the girl's head now, through

the cabin skylight. Further forward, José had joined the children at their game, and was crawling about on hands and knees with all of them on his back—a fire-engine, of course, such as they had seen in the illustrated magazines from England.

“Emily!” called Harry: “Come and play!”

Down with a rush fell the curtain on all Emily’s cogitations. In a second she was once more a happy little animal—*any* happy little animal. She slid down the shrouds like a real sailor, and in no time was directing the fire-fighting operations as imperiously as any other of this brigade of superintendents.

iii

That night in the Parliament of Beds there was raised at last a question which you may well be surprised had not been raised before. Emily had just reduced her family to silence

heard one of the sailors calling out pirates
had come on board."

Emily had an inspiration.

"No, you silly, he must have said *pilots*."

"What are pilots?" asked Laura.

"They come on board," explained Emily, lamely. "Don't you remember that picture in the dining-room at home, called 'The Pilot Comes On Board'?"

Laura listened with rapt attention. The explanation of what pilots were was not very illuminating; but then she did not know what pirates were either. So you might think the whole discussion meant very little to her, but there you would be wrong: the question was evidently important to the older ones, therefore she gave her whole mind to listening.

The pirate heresy was considerably shaken. How could they say for certain which word Margaret had really heard? Rachel changed sides.



Chapter Seven

EDWARD often thought, as he strode scowling up and down the deck by himself, that this was exactly the life for him. What a lucky boy he was, to have tumbled into it by good fortune, instead of having to run away to sea as most other people did! In spite of the White Mouse's pronouncement (whom secretly he had long ceased to believe in), he had no doubt that this was a pirate vessel; and no doubt either that when presently Jonsen was killed in some furious battle the sailors would unanimously elect him their captain.

The girls were a great nuisance. A ship was no place for them. When he was captain he would have them marooned.



Yet there had been a time when he had wished he was a girl himself. "When I was young," he once confided to the admiring Harry, "I used to think girls were bigger and stronger than boys. Weren't I silly?"

"Yes," said Harry.

Harry did not confide it to Edward, but he also, *now*, wished he was a girl. It was not for the same reason: younger than Edward, he was still at the amorous age; and because he found the company of girls almost magically pleasing, fondly imagined it would be even more so if he were one himself. He was always finding himself, for being a boy, shut out from their most secret councils. Emily of course was too old to count as female in his eyes: but to Rachel and Laura he was indiscriminately devoted. When Edward was captain, he would be mate: and when he imagined this future, it consisted for the most part in rescuing Rachel—or Laura,

down: she was pretty sure of that. It was all a little difficult to join up.—Then, when was it she had found that negro village? She could remember with a startling clearness bending down, and feeling among the bamboo roots for the bubbling spring, then looking round and seeing the black children scampering away up the clearing. That must have been years and years ago. But clearer than everything was that awful night when Tabby had stalked up and down the room, his eyes blazing and his fur twitching, his voice melodious with tragedy, until those horrible black shapes had flown in through the fanlight and savaged him out into the bush. The horror of the scene was even increased because it had once or twice come back to her in dreams, and because when she dreamt it (though it seemed the same) there was always some frightful difference. One night (and that was the worst of all) she had rushed out to rescue him, when her darling

tonholes were their especial delight. One did little washing: fresh water was too valuable, and salt water had practically no effect. From handling tarry ropes and greasy ironwork their hands would have disgraced a slum-child. There is a sailor saying which includes a peck of dirt in the mariner's monthly rations: but the children on the schooner must have often consumed far more.

Not that it was a dirty ship—the fo'c'sle probably was, but the Nordicism of captain and mate kept the rest looking clean enough. But even the cleanest-looking ship is seldom clean to the touch. Their clothes José washed occasionally with his own shirt: and in that climate they were dry again by the morning.

Jamaica had faded into the past. England, to which they had supposed they were going, and of which a very curious picture had formerly been built up in their minds by their parents' constant reference to it, receded again into the mists of myth. They lived in

the present, adapted themselves to it, and might have been born in a hammock and christened at a binnacle before they had been there many weeks. They seemed to have no natural fear of heights, and the farther they were above the deck, the happier. On a calm day Edward used to hang by his knees from the crosstrees in order to feel the blood run into his head. The flying-jib, too, which was usually down, made an admirable cocoon for hide-and-seek: one took a firm grip of the hanks and robands, and swathed oneself in the canvas. Once, suspecting Edward was hidden there, instead of going out on the jib-boom to look, the other children cast off the down-haul and then all together gave a great tug at the halyard which nearly pitched him into the sea. The shark myth is greatly exaggerated: it is untrue, for instance, that they can take a leg clean off at the hip—their bite is a tearing one, not a clean cut: and a practised bather can keep them off easily with a

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welt on the nose each time they turn over to strike: <sup>1</sup> but all the same, once overboard there would have been little hope for a small boy like Edward: and a severe wiggling they all got for their prank.

Often several of those thick, rubber-like protuberances would follow the vessel for hours—perhaps in the hope of just some such antic.

Sharks were not without their uses, however: it is well known that Catch a Shark Catch a Breeze, so when a breeze was needed the sailors baited a big hook and presently hauled one on board with the winch. The bigger he was, the better breeze was hoped for: and his tail was nailed to the jib-boom. One day they got a great whacking fellow on board, and having cut off his jaw someone heaved it into the ship's latrine (which no one was so lubberly as to use for its proper

<sup>1</sup> The tiger-shark of the South Seas is of course a very different cattle.

purpose), and thought no more about it. One wildish night, however, old José did go there, and sat full on that wicked cheval-de-frise. He yelled like a madman: and the crew were better pleased than they had been with any joke that year and even Emily thought if only it had been less improper how funny it would have been. It would certainly have puzzled an archæologist, faced with José's mummy, to guess how he came by those curious scars.

The ship's monkey also added a lot to the ship's merriment. One day some sucker-fish had fixed themselves firmly to the deck, and he undertook to dislodge them. After a few preliminary tugs, he braced three legs and his tail against the deck and lunged like a madman. But they would not budge. The crew were standing round in a ring, and he felt his honour was at stake: somehow, they *must* be removed. So, disgusting though they must have tasted to a vegetarian, he set to and ate





which sometimes befalls unpopular captains).

Further, there was hardly an article of ship's use, from the windlass to the bosun's chair, but she had metamorphosed it into some sort of furniture: a table or a bed or a lamp or a tea-set: and marked it as her property: and what she had marked as her property no one might touch—if she could prevent it. To parody Hobbes, she claimed as her own whatever she had mixed her imagination with; and the greater part of her time was spent in angry or tearful assertions of her property-rights.

Her other interest was moral. She had an extraordinary, vivid, simple sense, that child, of Right and Wrong—it almost amounted to a precocious ethical genius. Every action, her own or anyone else's, was immediately judged good or bad, and uncompromisingly praised or blamed. She was never in doubt.

To Emily, Conscience meant something





[illegible]

Not so Rachel: to her, Conscience was by no means so depressing an affair. It was simply a comfortable mainspring of her life, smooth-working, as pleasant as a healthy appetite. For instance, it was now tacitly admitted that all these men were pirates. That is, they were wicked. It therefore devolved on her to convert them: and she entered on her plans for this without a shadow of either misgiving or reluctance. Her conscience gave her no pain because it never occurred to her as conceivable that she should do anything but follow its dictates, or fail to see them clearly. She would try and convert these people, first: probably they would reform, but if they did not—well, she would send for the police. Since either result was right, it mattered not at all which Circumstance should call for.

So much for Rachel. The inside of Laura

was different indeed: something vast, complicated and nebulous that can hardly be put into language. To take a metaphor from tadpoles, though legs were growing her gills had not yet dropped off. Being nearly four years old she was certainly a child: and children are human (if one allows the term "human" a wide sense): but she had not altogether ceased to be a baby: and babies of course are not human—they are animals, and have a very ancient and ramified culture, as cats have, and fishes, and even snakes: the same in kind as these, but much more complicated and vivid, since babies are, after all, one of the most developed species of the lower vertebrates.

In short, babies have minds which work in terms and categories of their own which cannot be translated into the terms and categories of the human mind.

It is true they look human—but not so human, to be quite fair, as many monkeys.



Subconsciously, too, everyone recognises they are animals—why else do people always laugh when a baby does some action resembling the human, as they would at a Praying Mantis? If the baby was only a less-developed man, there would be nothing funny in it, surely.

Possibly a case might be made out that children are not human either: but I should not accept it. Agreed that their minds are not just more ignorant and stupider than ours, but differ in kind of thinking (are *mad*, in fact): but one can, by an effort of will and imagination, think like a child at least in a partial degree—and even if one's success is infinitesimal it invalidates the case: while one can no more think like a baby, in the smallest respect, than one can think like a bee.

How then can one begin to describe the inside of Laura, where the child-mind lived in the midst of the familiar relics of the baby-mind, like a Fascist in Rome?



When swimming under water, it is a very sobering thing suddenly to look a large octopus in the face. One never forgets it: one's respect, yet one's feeling of the hopelessness of any real intellectual sympathy. One is soon reduced to mere physical admiration, like any silly painter, of the cow-like tenderness of the eye, of the beautiful and infinitesimal mobility of that large and toothless mouth, which accepts as a matter of course that very water against which you, for your life's sake, must be holding your breath. There he reposes in a fold of rock, apparently weightless in the clear green medium but very large, his long arms, suppler than silk, coiled in repose, or stirring in recognition of your presence. Far above everything is bounded by the surface of the air, like a bright window of glass. Contact with a small baby can conjure at least an echo of that feeling in those who are not obscured by an uprush of maternity to the brain.



Of course it is not really so cut-and-dried as all this; but often the only way of attempting to express the truth is to build it up, like a card-house, of a pack of lies.

It was only in Laura's inner mind, however, that these elaborate vestiges of babyhood remained: outwardly she appeared fully a child—a rather reserved, odd, and indeed rather captivating one. Her face was not pretty, with its heavy eyebrows and reduced chin: but she had a power of apt movement, the appropriate attitude for every occasion that was most striking. A child who can show her affection for you, for instance, in the very way she plants her feet on the ground, has a liberal gift of that bodily genius called charm. Actually, this particular one was a rare gesture with her: nine-tenths of her life being spent in her own head, she seldom had time to feel at all strongly either for or against people. The feelings she thus expressed were generally of a more

impersonal kind, and would have fascinated an admirer of the ballet: and it was all the more remarkable that she had developed a dog-like devotion to the reserved and coarse-looking captain of the pirates.

No one really contends that children have any insight into character: their likings are mostly imaginative, not intuitive. "What do you think I am?" the exasperated ruffian had asked on a famous occasion. One might well ask what Laura thought he was: and there is no means of knowing.

## ii

Pigs grow quickly, quicker even than children: and much though the latter altered in the first month on board, the little black porker (whose name by the bye was Thunder) altered even more. He soon grew to such a size one could not possibly allow him









ready to warm up in tomorrow's soup, and the crew and children ate the liquor with biscuit: but if it was Sunday, the captain took the lump of meat and with a benevolent air cut it up in small pieces, as if indeed for a nursery, and mixed it up with the vegetables in the huge wooden bowl out of which crew and children all dipped. It was a very patriarchal way of feeding.

Even at dinner Margaret did not join the others, but ate in the cabin: though there was only two plates on the whole ship. Probably she used the mate's when he had finished.

Laura and Rachel fought that day to tears over a particularly succulent piece of yam. Emily let them. To make those two agree was a task she was wise not to undertake. Besides, she was very busy over her own dinner. Edward managed to silence them however by declaring in a most terrible voice "Shut up or I'll SABRE you!"

Emily's estrangement from the captain had

reached by now a rather uncomfortable stage. When these things are fresh and new the two parties avoid meeting, and all is well: but after some days they are apt to forget, find themselves on the point of chatting and then suddenly remember that they are not on speaking-terms and have to retire in confusion. Nothing can be more uncomfortable for a child. The difficulty of effecting a reconciliation in this case was that both parties felt wholly in the wrong. Each repented the impulse of a momentary insanity, and neither had an inkling the other felt the same: thus each waited for the other to show signs of forgiveness. Moreover, while the captain had far the more serious reason for being ashamed of himself, Emily was naturally far the more sensitive and concerned of the two: so it about balanced. Thus, if Emily rushed blithely up to the captain embracing a flying-fish, caught his eye and slunk round the other side of the galley, he put it down to



the right way round after all. Jonsen was delighted at the success of this ancient joke. Emily, trying to stand on one leg, bewildered also, lost her balance and clutched at Jonsen's arm. He looked at her—they all looked at her.

Much the best way of escaping from an embarrassing rencontre, when to walk away would be an impossible strain on the nerves, is to retire in a series of somersaults. Emily immediately started turning head over heels up the deck.

It was very difficult to keep direction, and the giddiness was appalling: but she *must* keep it up till she was out of sight, or die.

Just then Rachel, who was up the mainmast, dropped, for the first time, her marline-spike. She uttered a terrible shriek—for what *she* saw was a baby falling to dash its brains out on the deck.

Jonsen gave an ineffectual little grunt of

alarm—men never can learn to give a full-bodied scream like a woman.

But Emily gave the most desperate yell of all, though several seconds after the other two: for the wicked steel stood quivering in the deck, having gouged a track through her calf on the way. Her wrought-up nerves, and sickening giddiness, joined with the shock and pain to give a heart-rending poignancy to her crying. Jonsen was by her in a second, caught her up, and carried her sobbing miserably down into the cabin. There sat Margaret, bending over some mending, her slim shoulders hunched up, humming softly and feeling deadly ill.

"Get out!" said Jonsen, in a low, brutal voice. Without a word or sign Margaret gathered up her sewing and climbed on deck.

Jonsen smeared some Stockholm tar on a rag, and bound up Emily's leg with more than a little skill, though the tar of course was agonising to her. She had cried herself right



"WHEN I WAS A BOY IT WASN'T THOUGHT LUCKY TO  
GREASE YOUR OWN SEA BOOTS"









the cat was away. They looked like it, too, in the mornings.

Otto used sometimes to come and teach her to make fancy knots, and at the same time pour out his grievances against the captain: though these latter were always received with an uncomfortable silence. Otto was a Viennese by birth, but had stowed away in a Danube barge when he was ten years old, had taken to the sea, and thereafter generally served in English ships. The only place since his childhood where he had ever spent any considerable time on shore was Wales. For some years he had sailed coastwise from the once-promising harbour of Portdinlleyn, which is now practically dead: and so, as well as German, Spanish, and English, could talk Welsh fluently. It was not a long residence, but at an impressionable age; and when he talked to Emily of his past it was mostly of his life as a "boy" on the slate-boats. Captain Jonsen came of a Danish family set-

tled on the Baltic coast, at Lübeck. He too had spent most of his time on English ships. How or when he and Otto had first met, or how they had drifted into the Cuban piracy business, Emily never discovered. They had plainly been inseparable for many years. She preferred letting them ramble on, to asking questions or trying to fit things together: she had that sort of mind.

When the knots palled, José sent her a beautiful crochet-hook he had carved out of a beef bone: and by pulling threads out of a piece of sail-cloth she was able to set to work to crochet doyleys for the cabin table. But I am afraid that she also drew a lot, till the whole of the inside of the bunk was soon as thoroughly scribbled-over as a palæolithic cave. What the captain would say when he found out was a consideration best postponed. The fun was to find knots, and unevennesses in the paint, that looked like something; and then with a pencil make them look



him up, bring him on board the schooner, and lay him on the cabin floor where Emily could keep an eye on him. He reeked of some particularly nauseous brand of cigars, that made her head swim.

The other children had played quite an important part in the capture. They did far better as a badge of innocuousness than even the "ladies." The steamer (little more than dressed-up sailing vessels they were then), thoroughly disgruntled at the weather, was wallowing about like a porpoise, her decks awash and her funnel over one ear, so to speak: so when a boat put out from the schooner, its departure cheered lustily by Edward, Harry, Rachel and Laura, though his pride might resent it the Dutchman never thought of suspecting this presumable offer of assistance, and let them come on board.

It was then he began to give trouble, and they had to remove him onto the schooner. Their tempers were none too good on finding



other yelled like the damned. Then a shot was fired in the air, and something thrown overboard to make a splash. All this, of course, was to impress those still down in the cabin awaiting their turns: and the pretence was quite as effective as the reality could have been. But it did no good, since probably there was no treasure to disclose.

There was, however, a plentiful supply of Dutch spirits and liqueurs on board: and these they found a welcome change after so much West Indian rum.

After they had been drinking them for an hour or two Otto had a brilliant idea. Why not give the children a circus? They had begged and begged to be taken onto the steamer to see the animals. Well, why not stage something really magnificent for them—a fight between the lion and the tiger, for instance?

No sooner said than done. The children, and every man who could be spared, came





in Jonsen's stuffy cabin with the Dutch captain to guard.

When at first they had been left alone together he had tried to speak to her: but unlike so many Dutchmen he did not know a word of English. He could just move his head, and he kept turning his eyes first on a very sharp knife which some idiot had dropped in a corner of the cabin floor, then on Emily. He was asking her to get it for him, of course.

But Emily was terrified of him. There is something much more frightening about a man who is tied up than a man who is not tied up—I suppose it is the fear he may get loose.

The feeling of not being able to get out of the bunk and escape added the true nightmare panic.

Remember that he had no neck, and the cigar-reek.

At last he must have caught the look of







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lected their men and with big levers managed to tilt the cages, spilling the beasts out onto the deck.

But not even so would they fight—or even show signs of resentment. As they had lain and groaned in their cages, so they now lay and groaned on the deck.

They were small specimens of their kind, and emaciated by travel. Otto with a sudden oath seized the tiger round its middle and hauled it upright on its hind legs: Jonsen did the same by the more top-heavy lion: and so the two principals to the duel faced each other, their heads lolling over the arms of their seconds.

But in the eyes of the tiger a slight ember of consciousness seemed to smoulder. Suddenly it tautened its muscles: a slight effort, yet it burst from the merely human grip of Otto like Samson from the new ropes—nearly dislocated his arms before he had time to let go. Quicker than eye could see it had cuffed

Chapter Eight

THE contempt they already felt for Margaret, their complete lack of pity in her obvious illness and misery, had been in direct proportion to the childhood she had belied.

This crime would have seemed to them grave on the part of a grown man, in its unrelieved wantonness: but done by one of her years, and nurture, it was unspeakable. She was lifted by the arms from the stair where she still sat, and without a moment's hesitation (other than that resulting from too many helping hands) was dropped into the sea.

But yet the expression of her face, as—like the big white pig in the squall—she vanished to windward, left a picture in Otto's mind he never forgot. She was, after all, his affair.



The Dutchman's body was fetched up on deck. Captain Jonsen went below: and once bent over poor little Emily. She screwed up her eyes tighter when she felt his hot breath on her face. She did not open them till everybody had quite gone—and shut them again when presently José came to swab the cabin floor.

The second boat, bringing back the rest of the crew and the four children, almost ran into Margaret before they saw her. She was swimming desperately, but in complete silence: her hair now plastered across her eyes and mouth, now floating out on the water as her head went under. They lifted her into the boat and set her in the stern-sheets with the other children. So it was they found themselves together again.

In her sopping condition, the others naturally gave her elbow-room: but still, she was *among* them. They sat and stared at her,



They none of them noticed quite how it happened: but in less than half an hour they were all five absorbed in a game of Consequences. Presently one of the crew came, peered down the hatch and then shouted "Yes!" to the rest, and then went away again. But they neither saw nor heard him.

From now on, however, the atmosphere of the schooner suffered a change. A murder is inclined to have this effect, on a small community. As a matter of fact, the Dutch captain's was the first blood to be shed on board, in the course of business at any rate (I will not answer for private quarrels). The way it had been shed left the pirates profoundly shocked, their eyes opened to a depravity of human nature they had not dreamt of: but also it gave them an uncomfortable feeling round the neck. So long as there was only the circus-prank to avenge, no American man-of-war was likely to be despatched in their pursuit: high Naval Authorities shrink naturally

from any contact with the ridiculous: but suppose the steamer put into port, and announced the forcible abduction of her captain? Or worse, suppose her mate, with an accursed spy-glass, had seen that captain's bloody body take its last dive? Pursuit would be only too likely.

The plea "It was none of us men did this wicked deed, but one of our young female prisoners," was hardly one which could be submitted to a jury.

Captain Jonsen had discovered from the steamer's log where he was: so he put the schooner about, and set a course for his refuge at Santa Lucia. It was unlikely, he thought, now, that any British man-of-war would still be cruising about the scene of the *Clorinda* episode—they had too much to do: and he had reasons (fairly expensive ones) for not anticipating any molestation from the Spanish authorities. He did not like going

home with an empty ship, of course: but that appeared inevitable.

The outward sign of this change in the atmosphere of the schooner was a spontaneous increase in the strictness of discipline. Not a drop of rum was drunk. Watch was kept with the regularity of a line-of-battle ship. The schooner became tidier, more seamanlike in every way.

Thunder was slain and eaten, the next day, without any regard for the feelings of his lovers: indeed, all tenderness towards the children vanished. Even José ceased playing with them. They were treated with a detached severity not wholly divorced from fear—as if these unfortunate men at last realised what diabolic yeast had been introduced into their lump.

So sensible were the children themselves of the change that they even forgot to mourn for Thunder—excepting Laura, whose face burned an angry red for half a day.



But the ship's monkey, on the other hand, with no pig now to tease, nearly died of ennui.

ii

The reopening of the wound in her leg made it several days more before Emily was fit to be moved from the cabin. During this time she was much alone. Jonsen and Otto seldom came below, and when they did were too preoccupied to heed her blandishing. She sang, and conversed to herself, almost incessantly; only interrupting herself to beseech these two, with a superfluity of endearments, to pick up her crochet hook, to look at the animal she had built out of her blanket, to tell her a story, to tell her what naughty things they did when they were little—how unlike Emily it was, all this gross bidding for attention! But as a rule they went away again, or



When she sang, however, it was always wordless: an endless succession of notes, like a bird's, fixed to the first vocable handy, and practically without tune. Not being musical, there was never any reason for her to stop: so one song would often go on for half an hour.

Although José had scrubbed the cabin floor as well as he could, a large stain still remained.

At times she let her mind wander about, quite peacefully, in her memories of Jamaica: a period which now seemed to her very remote, a golden age. How young she must have been! When her imagination grew tired, too, she could recall the Anansi stories Old Sam had told her: and they often proved the point of departure for new ones of her own.

Also she could remember the creepy things he had told her about duppies. How they used to tease the negroes about the supposed duppy at the bathing hole, the duppy of the

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drowned man! It gave one an enormous sense of power, that—not to believe in duppies.

But she found herself taking much less pleasure in duppies now than she used.

She even once caught herself wondering what the Dutchman's duppy would look like, all bloody, with its head turned backwards on its shoulders and clanking a chain . . . it was a momentary flash, the way the banished image of Tabby had come back to her. For a moment her head reeled: in another she was far from Jamaica, far from the schooner, far from duppies, on a golden throne in the remotest East.

The other children were no longer allowed in the cabin to visit her: but when she heard their feet scamp, Nig overhead, she often conversed with them in loud yells. One of these yells from abong told her:

"Marghie's back, y'els' now."

"O-oh."



After that Emily was silent for a bit, her beautiful, innocent grey eyes fixed on the ear of a dwarf at the end of her bunk. Only the slight pucker at the top of her nose showed with what intensity she was thinking: and the minute drops of sweat on her temples.

But it was not only when there was some outward occasion, like this, that she suffered acute distress.

Froth as she might, those times of consciousness, which had begun with a moment of such sublime vision, were both growing on her and losing their lustre. They were become sinister. Life threatened to be no longer an incessant, automatic discharge of energy: more and more often, and when least expected, all that would suddenly drop from her, and she would remember that she was *Emily*, who had killed . . . and who was *here* . . . and that Heaven alone knew what was going to happen to the incompetent little thing, by what miracle she was going to keep

her end up. . . . Whenever this happened, her stomach seemed to drop away within her a hundred and fifty feet.

She, like Laura, had one foot each side of a threshold now. As a piece of Nature, she was practically invulnerable. But as *Emily*, she was absolutely naked, tender. It was particularly cruel that this transition should come when so fierce a blast was blowing.

For mark this: anyone in bed, with a blanket up to her chin, is in a measure safe. She might go through abysses of terror; but once these passed, no practical harm had been done. But once she was up and about? Suppose it was at some crisis, some call to action that her Time came on her? What appalling blunder could she fail to make?

Oh why must she grow up? Why, for pity's sake?

Quite apart from these attacks of blind, secret panic, she had other times of an ordinary, very rational anxiety. She was ten and



longer. Some appalling Power had determined it: it was no good struggling against it. Had she not already committed the most awful of crimes . . . the most awful of crimes, though, that was not murder, that was the mysterious crime against the Holy Ghost, which dwarfed even murder . . . had she, unwittingly, at some time done this too? She so easily might have, since she did not know what it was. And if that were so, no wonder the pity of Heaven was sealed against her!

So the poor little outcast lay, shivering and sweating under her blanket, her gentle eyes fixed on the ear of the dwarf she had drawn.

But presently she was singing again happily, and hanging right out of the bunk to outline in pencil the brown stain on the floor. A touch here, a touch there, and it was an old market-woman to the life, hobbling along with a bundle on her back! I admit that it staggered even Otto, a bit, when he came in later and saw what she had done.



But when again she lay still on her back, and contemplated the practical difficulties of the life ahead of her (even leaving God and her Soul and all that on one side) she had not the support of Edward's happy optimism: she was old enough to know how helpless she really was. How should she, dependent now for her very life on the kindness of those around her, how could she ever acquire the wit and strength to struggle against them and their kind?

She had developed by this time a rather curious feeling about Jonsen and Otto. In the first place, she had become very fond of them. Children it is true have a way of becoming more or less attached to anyone they are in close contact with: but it was more than that, deeper. She was far fonder of them than she had ever been of her parents, for instance. They, for their part, showed every mild sign consonant with their natures of being fond of her: but how could she *know*?

It would be so easy for adult things like them to dissemble to her, she felt. Suppose they really intended to kill her: they could so easily hide it: they would behave with exactly this same kindness. . . . I suppose it was the reflection of her own instinct for secretiveness?

When she heard the Captain's step on the stairs, it might be that he was bringing her a plate of soup, or it might be that he had come to kill her—suddenly, with no warning change of expression on his amiable face even at the very end.

If that was his intention, there was nothing whatever she could do to hinder him. To scream, struggle, attempt flight—they would be absolutely useless, and—well, a breach of decorum. If he chose to keep up appearances, it behoved her to do so too. If he showed no sign of his intention, she must show no sign of her inkling of it.

That was why, when either of them came



below, she would sing on, smile at him impishly and confidently, actually plague him for notice.

She was a little fonder of Jonsen than of Otto. Ordinarily, any coarseness or malformity of adult flesh is in the highest degree repulsive to a child: but the cracks and scars on Jonsen's enormous hands were as interesting to her as the valleys on the moon to a boy with a telescope. As he clumsily handled his parallel rulers and dividers, fitting them with infinite care to the marks on his chart, Emily would lie on her side and explore them, give them all names.

*Why* must she grow up? *Why* couldn't she leave her life always in other people's keeping, to order as if it was no concern of hers?

Most children have something of this feeling. With most children it is outweighed: still, they will generally hesitate before telling you they prefer to grow up. But then,





was occupied with Santa Lucia, and his young lady there. Jonsen slipper-slopped up and down his side of the deck.

Presently, his interest in his subject waning, Otto's eye was caught by the ship's monkey, which was sporting on its back on the cabin skylight.

That animal, with the same ingenious adaptability to circumstance which has produced the human race, had now solved the playmate question. As a gambler will play left hand against right, so he fought back legs against front. His extraordinary lissomeness made the dissociation most lifelike: he might not have been joined at the waist at all, for all the junction discommoded him. The battle, if good-tempered on both sides, was quite a serious one: now, while his hind feet were doing their best to pick out his eyes, his sharp little teeth closed viciously on his own private parts.

From below the skylight, too, came tears



between them: what they chiefly discussed was the building of a magnificent raft, to use in the bathing-hole at Ferndale; just as if they had never left the place.

When she heard the captain's step, so nearly surprising her at it, she blushed a deep red. She felt her cheeks still hot when he arrived. As usual, he did not even glance at her. He plumped down on a seat, put his elbows on the cabin table, his head in his hands, and rocked it rhythmically from side to side.

"Look, Captain!" she insisted. "Do I look pretty like this? Look! *Look!* Look, *do* I look pretty like this?"

For once he raised his head, turned, and considered her at length. She had rolled up her eyes till only the whites showed, and turned her under-lip inside out. With her first finger she was squashing her nose almost level with her cheeks.



"No," he said simply, "you do not." Then he returned to his cogitation.

She stuck out her tongue as well, and wagged it.

"Look!" she went on, "Look!"

But instead of looking at her, he let his eye wander round the cabin. It seemed changed somehow—emasculated: a little girl's bedroom, not a man's cabin. The actual physical changes were tiny: but to a meticulous man, they glared. The whole place smelt of children.

Unable to contain himself, he crammed on his cap and burst up the stairs.

On deck, the others were romping round the binnacle, wildly excited.

"*Damn!*" cried Jonsen at the sight of them, stamping in an ungovernable rage.

Of course his slippers came off, and one of them skiddered up the deck.

What devil entered into Edward I do not know; but the sight was too much for him.





with outrage for pride of place: but at this point they broke into a cheer. Then, like the devils in a pantomime, they all sank together through the floor, aghast at themselves, and pulled the scuttle over their heads.

Laura, still hugging the slipper, caught her toe in an eye-bolt and fell full length, set up a yell.

Otto, with a suddenly straight face, ran forward, picked up the slipper and returned it to Jonsen, who put it on. Edward stopped jumping up and down and became frightened.

Jonsen was trembling with rage. He advanced on Edward with an iron belaying pin in his hand.

"Come down from there!" he commanded.

"Don't! Don't! Don't!" cried Edward, not moving. Harry suddenly ran and hid himself in the galley, though he had had no part in it.

With a surprising agility which he rarely

used, Jonsen started out along the bowsprit towards Edward, who did nothing but moan "Don't!" at the sight of that murderous belaying pin. When Jonsen was just on him, however, he swarmed up a stay, helping himself with the iron hanks of the jib.

Jonsen returned to the deck, wringing his hands and angrier than ever. He sent a sailor to the crosstrees to head the boy off and drive him down again.

Indeed, but for an extraordinary diversion, I shudder to think what might have happened to him. But just at this moment there appeared, up the ladder from the children's forehold, Rachel. She wore one of the sailors' shirts, back to front, and reaching to her heels: in her hand, a book. She was singing "*Onward Christian Soldiers*" at the top of her voice. But as soon as she reached the deck she became silent: strutted straight aft, looking neither to right nor left, genuflected







cerned, on her back, her knees drawn up to her chin, humming a little tune.

iv

When Emily returned to the forehold, her first act was one which greatly complicated life. As if there was not sea enough already, outside the ship, she decreed that practically all the deck was sea also. The main hatch was an island, of course; and there were others—chiefly natural excrescences of the same kind. But all the rest, all the open deck, could only be safely crossed in a boat, or swimming.

As to who was in a boat, and who wasn't, Emily decided that herself. No one ever knew, till they had asked her. But Laura, once she had got the main idea into her head, always swam, whether said to be in a boat or not—to be on the safe side.



"Isn't she silly?" said Edward, once, when she refused to stop working her arms although they had all told her she was safe on board.

"I expect we were all as silly as that, when we were young," said Harry.

It was a source of consternation to the children that none of the grown-ups would recognise this "sea". The sailors trod carelessly on the deepest oceans, refusing so much as to paddle with their hands. But it was equally irritating to the sailors when the children, either safe on an island or bearing down in a vessel of their own, would scream at them in a tone of complete conviction:

"You're drowning! You're drowning! O-o-oh, look out! You're out of your depth there! The sharks'll eat you!"

"O-oh look! Miguel's sinking! The waves are right over his head!"

That happens to be the one sort of joke sailors can't enjoy. Even though the words were unintelligible, their gist—eked out by

the slightly malicious hints of the mate—was not. If they steadily refused to swim, they at least took to crossing themselves fervently and continuously whenever they had to traverse a piece of open deck. For there was no way one could be certain that these brats were not gifted with second sight—*hijos de puntas!*

What the children were really doing, of course, was trying out what it would feel like when they themselves were all grown pirates, running a joint venture or each with a craft of his own: and though they never so much as mentioned piracy in the course of these public navigations, they talked their heads off about it at night, now.

Margaret also refused to swim: but they knew by now it was no good trying to make her: no good yelling at *her* she was drowning, for all she did at that word was to sit down and cry. So it became a recognised convention that Margaret, wherever she





gether: and it was enough for *her* to say something for it to be automatically voted silly.

Rachel also, for several days after her service, showed no disposition to join with the others either. She preferred to sit about below, sulking, in the hold. From time to time she attempted to pick a hole, with a copper nail she had got hold of, in the bottom of the ship, and so sink it. It was Laura who discovered her purpose, and came hot-foot to Emily with the news. Laura never doubted, any more than Rachel did, that the task was a possible one.

Emily came below, and found her at it. After three days, she had only managed to scratch up one single splinter—partly because she never attacked the same place twice: but both she and Laura expected to see quantities of water come welling through, and rapidly fill the ship. Indeed, though no water had yet appeared, Laura was convinced the ship



“Do you know what I am going to do?” she asked in a strange voice.

At the sound of it Rachel stopped scratching and looked up.

"No," she said, a trifle uneasily.

"I'm going to kill you! I'm turned a pirate, and I'm going to kill you with this sword!"

At the word "sword", the misshapen lump of metal seemed to Rachel to flicker to a sharp, wicked point.

She looked Emily in the eyes, doubtfully. Did she mean it, or was it a game?

As a matter of fact, she had always been a little afraid of Emily. Emily was so huge, so strong, so old (as good as grown up), so cunning! Emily was the cleverest, the most powerful person in the world! The muscles of a giant, the ancient experience of a serpent!—And now, her terrible eyes, with no hint in them of pretence.

Emily glared fixedly, and saw real panic











Emily put her arm round his waist and gave it a slight hug.

"What is it?" she said: "Do let me look."

Jonsen said nothing, continuing to stare with concentration.

"*Do* let me look!" said Emily: "I haven't ever looked through a telescope, ever!"

Jonsen abruptly snapped the glass to, and looked down at her. His usually expressionless features were stirred from their roots. He lifted one hand and gently began to stroke her hair.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"Mm," assented Emily. Later she added, with a wriggle, "You're a darling."

"If it was to help me, would you do something . . . very difficult?"

"Yes but *do* let me have a look through your telescope, because I haven't, not ever, and I do so want to!"

Jonsen gave a weary sigh, and sat down on

the cabin-top. What *on Earth* were children's heads made of, inside?

"Now listen," he said: "I want to talk to you seriously."

"Yes," said Emily, trying to hide her extreme discomfort. Her eye plaintively searched the deck for something to hold it. He pressed her against his knee in an attempt to win her attention.

"If bad, cruel men came and wanted to kill me and take you away, what would you do?"

"Oh how horrid!" said Emily: "Will they?"

"Not if you help me."

It was unbearable. With a sudden leap she was astride his knees, her arms round his neck and her hands pressing the back of his head.

"I wonder if you make a good Cyclops?" she said; and holding his head firmly laid her nose to his nose, her forehead to his forehead, both staring into each other's eyes, an inch





## *Chapter Nine*

THE darkness closed down with its sudden curtain on that minatory finger.

Captain Jonsen remained on deck all night, whether it was his watch or not. It was a hot night, even for those latitudes: and no moon. The suffused brilliance of the stars lit up everything close quite plainly, but showed nothing in the distance. The black masts towered up, clear against the jewelry, which seemed to swing slowly a little to one side, a little to the other, of their tapering points. The sails, the shadows in their curves all diffused away, seemed flat. The halyards and topping-lifts and braces showed here, were invisible there, with an arbitrariness which took from them all meaning as mechanism.

Looking forward with the glowing bin-  
nacle-light at one's back, the narrow milky  
deck sloped up to the foreshortened tilt of the  
bowsprit, which seemed to be trying to point  
at a single enlarged star just above the hori-  
zon.

The schooner moved just enough for the sea to divide with a slight rustle on her stem, breaking out into a shower of sparks, which lit up also wherever the water rubbed the ship's side, as if the ocean were a tissue of sensitive nerves; and still twinkled behind in the mere paleness of the wake. Only a faint tang of tar in the nostrils was there to remind one that this was no ivory and ebony fantasia but a machine. For a schooner is in fact one of the most mechanically satisfactory, austere, unornamented engines ever invented by Man.

A few yards off, a shoal of luminous fish shone at different depths.

But a few hundred yards off, one could see nothing! The sea became a steady glittering





the frigate was so far down the wind' they had easily shown her a clean pair of heels.

But tonight! There was no friendly moon-track to betray the attacker: nothing but this inner conviction, which grew every moment more certain.

Shortly after midnight he had descended from one of his useless climbs to the mast-head, and stood for a moment by the open forehatch. The warm breath of the children was easily discernible. Margaret was chattering in her sleep—quite loud, but you could not distinguish a single clear word.

Moved by a whim, Jonsen climbed down the ladder into the hold. Below, it was hot as an oven. A zooming winged cockroach cannoned about. The sound of the water, a dry rustle above, was here a pleasant gurgle and plop against the wooden shell; most musical of sounds to a sailor.

Laura lay on her back in the faint light of the open hatch. She had discarded her









"Get below!" hissed Jonsen furiously: "Don't you dare come up again! And don't let any of the others, till I tell you!"

Emily, thoroughly frightened, tumbled down the ladder as fast as she could and rolled herself in her blanket from head to foot: partly because her bare legs were really a little chilled, but more for comfort. What had she done? What was happening? She was hardly down when feet were heard scurrying across the deck, and the hatches over her head were loosely fitted into place. The darkness was profound, and seemed to be rolling on her. No one was within reach: and she dared not move an inch. Everyone was asleep.

Jonsen called all hands on deck: and in silence they mustered at the rail. The patch was clearly visible now: nearer, and smaller than he had thought at first. They listened for the splash of oars: but it came on in silence.



low the horizon less than an hour after he had first sighted it.

ii

But the alarm of that night caused Jonsen at last to make up his mind.

He altered his course: and as before he had designed it to avoid other shipping, now on the contrary it was calculated to run as soon as possible into the very track of the Eastward Bounders.

Otto rubbed his eyes. What had come over the fellow? Did he want revenge for the fright he had had? Was he going to try and cut out a prize right in the thick of the traffic? It would be like Jonsen, that; to put his head in the lion's mouth after trembling at its roar: and Otto's heart warmed towards him. But he asked no questions.

Meanwhile Jonsen went to his cabin,

opened a secret receptacle in his bunk, and took out a job-lot of ships' papers which he had bought from a Havana dealer in such things. *The "John Dodson", of Liverpool, bound for the Seychelles with a cargo of cast-iron pots*—what use was that in these waters? The man had sold him a pup!—Ah, this was better: *"Lizzie Green", of Bristol, bound from Matanzas to Philadelphia in ballast . . .* a funny trip to make in ballast, true: but that was no one's affair but his imaginary owner's. Jonsen made sure all was in order—filled in the blank dates, and so on—then returned the bundle to its hiding place for another occasion. Coming on deck he gave a number of orders.

First, stages were rigged over the bows and stern, and José and a paint-pot went over the rail to add *Lizzie Green* to the many names which from time to time had decorated the schooner's escutcheon. Not content with that, he had it painted on every other appropriate



a capture just as easily without them: and further, that the captured merchantman, in making his report, could generally be counted on to imagine a greater or less display of artillery. Whether it was to save their faces, or pure conservatism—presumption that there must have been guns—nearly every vessel Jonsen had had dealings with had reported masked artillery, manned by "fifty or seventy ruffians of the worst Spanish type."

Of course if he met and was challenged by a man-of-war, he would have to give in without a fight. But then, it never pays to fight a man-of-war anyhow. If he is a big one, he sinks you. If he is some little cock-shell of a cutter, commanded by a fire-eating young officer just into his teens, you sink him—and then there is the devil to pay. Better be sunk outright, than insult the honour of a great nation in that fashion.

When he at last remembered to take the hatches off the children, they were half dead



with suffocation. It was hot enough, stuffy enough anyhow down there, only the square opening above for ventilation; but with the hatches even loosely in place it was a Black Hole. Emily had at last dropped asleep, and slept late, through a chain of night-mares: when she did wake in the closed hold, she sat up, then fainted immediately, and fell back, her breath coming in loud snores. Before she came to again she was already sobbing miserably. At that the little ones began to cry too: which sound it was that reminded Jonsen, rather late, to take the hatches off.

He was quite alarmed when he saw them. It was not till they had been out in the morning freshness of the deck for some time that they even summoned up interest in the strange metamorphosis of the schooner that was in progress.

Jonsen looked at them with a troubled eye. They had not indeed the appearance of well cared for children; though he had not noticed









"There's nothing else you can do," said Otto stubbornly.

A light of comprehension dawned suddenly in Jonsen's worried face.

"We could sew them up in little bags," he said with a genial smile, "and put them over the side."

Otto gave him one quick glance; what he saw was enough to relieve him.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Sew them up in little bags! Sew them up in little bags!" Jonsen affirmed, rubbing his hands together and chuckling, all the latent sentimentality of the man getting the better of him. Then he pushed past Otto and went on deck.

The big brigantine, which he had aimed for at first, was proving a bit too far up the wind for him: so now he took the helm and let the schooner's head down a couple of points, to intercept the steamer instead.





THE CHILDREN AND THE SCHOONER'S CREW STOOD AT  
THE RAIL IN TENSE EXCITEMENT









Emily was as excited as any of them, pointing out the novel features of this extraordinary vessel. The children still thought it was professional quarry. Edward was openly bragging of what he would do when he had captured it.

"I shall cut the captain's head off and throw it in the water!" he declared aloud.

"S-s-sh!" exclaimed Harry, in a stage whisper.

"Coo! I don't care!" cried Edward, intoxicated with bravado: "Then I shall take out all the gold and keep it for myself."

"I shall sink it!" said Harry, in imitation: then added as an afterthought, "Right to the very bottom!"

Emily fell silent, her peculiarly vivid imagination having the mastery of her. She saw the hold of the steamer, piled with gold and jewels. She saw herself, fighting her way

through hordes of hairy sailors, with her bare fists, till only the steamer's captain stood between her and the treasure.

Then it happened! It was as if a small cold voice inside her said suddenly: "*How can you? You're only a little girl!*" She felt herself falling giddily from the heights, shrinking. She was *Emily*.

The awful, blood-covered face of the Dutch captain seemed to threaten her out of the air. She cowered back at the shock. But it was over in a moment.

She looked around her in terror. Did anyone know how defenceless she was? Surely someone must have noticed her. The other children were gibbering in their animal innocence. The sailors, their knives half concealed, grinned at each other or cursed. Otto, his brows knotted, stood with his eyes fixed on the steamer.

She feared everybody, she hated everybody.



tired. Why must she be chained for ever to this awful life? Could she never escape, never get back to the ordinary life little girls lead, with their papas and mamas and . . . birthday cakes?

Otto called her. She went to him obediently; though with a presentiment that it was to her execution. He turned, and called Margaret too.


She was in a more attentive mood than she had been the night before with the captain, Heaven knows! But Otto was too pre-occupied to notice how frightened her eyes were.

Jonsen had no easy task on the steamer: but Otto did not greatly relish his own. He did not know how to begin—and everything depended on his success.

"See here," he burst out: "You're going to England."

Emily shot him a quick glance. "Yes?" she said at last: her voice showing merely a polite interest.




 Otto was astonished she took his point so readily.

"No," he said. "The Captain and me don't want you to. We want you to keep it a secret, do you see?"

"What *are* we to say, then?" Emily asked.

"Tell them . . . you were captured by pirates, and then . . . they put you ashore at a little port in Cuba ——"

"—Where the Fat Woman was?"

“—Yes. And then we came along, and took you on board our schooner, which was going to America, to save you from the pirates.”

"I see," said Emily.

"You'll say that, and keep the . . . other a secret?" Otto asked anxiously.

Emily gave him her peculiar, gentle stare.

"Of course!" she said.

Well, he had done his best: but Otto felt heavy at heart. That little cherub! He didn't

believe she could keep a secret for ten seconds.

"Now: do you think you can make the little ones understand?"

"Oh yes, I'll tell them," said Emily easily. She considered for a moment: "I don't suppose they remember much anyway.—Is that all?"

"That's all," said Otto; and they walked away.

"What was he saying?" Margaret asked.  
"What was it all about?"

“Oh shut up!” said Emily rudely: “It’s nothing to do with you!”

But inwardly, she did not know whether she was on her head or her heels. Were they really going to let her escape? Weren't they just tantalising her, meaning to stop her at the last moment? Were they handing her over to strangers, who had come to hang her for murder? Was her mother perhaps on that steamer, come to save her? But she loved





the sea instead. Now they knew why they had been washed and combed.

It did not seem at first as if there was going to be any difficulty about getting them started. But it was Rachel who began the break-away:

"My babies! My babies!" she shrieked, and began running all over the ship, routing out bits of rag, fuzzy rope-ends, paint-pots . . . her arms were soon full.

"Here, you can't take all that junk!" dissuaded Otto.

"Oh but my darlings, I can't leave you behind!" cried Rachel piteously. Out rushed the cook, just in time to retrieve his ladle—and a battle-royal began.

Naturally, Jonsen was on tenterhooks to be gone. But it was essential they should part on good terms.

José was lifting Laura over the side.

"*Darling* José!" she burst out suddenly, and twined her arms tightly round his neck.

At that Harry and Edward, who were al-

ready in the boat, scrambled back on deck. They had forgotten to say goodbye. And so each child said goodbye to each pirate, kissing him and lavishing endearments on him.

"Go on! Go on!" muttered Jonsen impatiently.

Emily flung herself in his arms, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Don't make me go!" she begged: "Let me stay with you always, always!" She clung tight to the lapels of his coat, hiding her face in his chest: "Oh I *don't* want to go!"

Jonsen was strangely moved: for a moment, almost toyed with the idea.

But the others were already in the boat.

"Come on!" said Otto, "or they'll go without you!"

"Wait! Wait!" shrieked Emily, and was over the side and in the boat in a flash.

Jonsen shook his head confusedly. For this last time, she had him puzzled.

But now, as they rowed across to the





And well might they forget it! For exciting as it had been to go onto a ship of any kind for the first time, to find themselves on this steamer was infinitely more so. The luxury of it! The white paint! The doors! The windows! The stairs! The brass!—A fairy palace, no: but a mundane wonder of a quite unimagined kind.

But they had little time now to take in the details. All the passengers, wild with curiosity, were gathered round them in a ring. As the dirty, disheveled little mites were handed one by one on board, a gasp went up. The story of the capture of the *Clorinda* by as fiendish a set of buccaneers as any in the past that roamed the same Carribean was well known; and how the little innocents on board her had been taken and tortured to death before the eyes of the impotent captain. To see now face to face the victims of so foul a murder was for them too a thrill of the first water.

The tension was first broken by a beautiful





“You look rather heavy. May I see if I can lift you?”

"Yes."

He clasped his arms round her stomach from behind, leant back, and staggered a few paces with her. Then he set her down, the friendship cemented.

Emily stood apart; and for some reason, everyone unconsciously respected her reserve. But suddenly something seemed to snap in her heart. She flung herself face-downwards on the deck—not crying, but kicking convulsively. It was a huge great stewardess who picked her up and carried her, still quivering from head to foot, down to a neat, clean cabin. There, soothing and talking to her without ceasing, she undressed her, and washed her with warm water, and put her to bed.

Emily's head felt different to any way it had ever felt before: hardly as if it were her own. It sang, and went round like a wheel,



without so much as with your leave or by your leave. But her body, on the other hand, was more than usually sensitive, absorbing the tender, smooth coolness of the sheets, the softness of the mattress, as a thirsty horse sucks up water. Her limbs drank in comfort at every pore: it seemed as if she could never be sated with it. She felt physical peace soaking slowly through to her marrow: and when at last it got there, her head became more quiet and orderly too.

All this while she had hardly heard what was said to her: only a refrain that ran through it all made any impression, "*Those wicked men . . . men . . . nothing but men . . . those cruel men. . .*"

Men! It was perfectly true that for months and months she had seen nothing but men. To be at last back among other women was heavenly. When the kind stewardess bent over her to kiss her she caught tight hold of her, and buried her face in the warm, soft,

yielding flesh, as if to sink herself in it. Lord, how unlike the firm, muscular bodies of Jonsen and Otto!

When the stewardess stood up again, Emily feasted her eyes on her, eyes grown large and warm and mysterious. The woman's enormous, swelling bosom fascinated her. Forlornly, she began to pinch her own thin little chest. Was it conceivable she would herself ever grow breasts like that—beautiful, mountainous breasts, that had to be cased in a sort of cornucopia? Or even firm little apples, like Margaret's?

Thank God she had not been born a boy! She was overtaken with a sudden revulsion against the whole sex of them. From the tips of her fingers to the tips of her toes she felt female: one with that exasperating, idiotic secret communion: initiate of the *γυναικείον*

Suddenly Emily reached up and caught the stewardess by the head, pulling it down to her close: began whispering earnestly in her ear.



On the woman's face the first look of incredulity changed to utter stupefaction, from stupefaction to determination.

"My eye!" she said at last: "The cheek of the rascals! The impudence!"

Without another word she slipped out of the cabin. And you may imagine that the steamer captain, when he heard the trick that had been played upon him, was as astonished as she.

For a few moments after she had gone Emily lay staring at nothing, a very curious expression on her face indeed. Then, all of a sudden, she dropped asleep, breathing sweetly and easily.

But she only slept for about ten minutes; and when she woke the cabin door was open, and in it stood Rachel and her little boy friend.

"What do you want?" said Emily forbiddingly.

“Harold has brought his alligator,” said Rachel.

Harold stepped forward, and laid the little creature on Emily's coverlet. It was very small: only about six inches long: a yearling: but an exact miniature of its adult self, with the snub nose and round Socratic forehead that distinguish it from the crocodile. It moved jerkily, like a clockwork toy. Harold picked it up by the tail: it spread its paws in the air, and jerked from side to side, more like clockwork than ever. Then he set it down again, and it stood there, its tongueless mouth wide open and its harmless teeth looking like grains of sand-paper, alternately barking and hissing. Harold let it snap at his finger—it was plainly hungry, in the warmth down there. It darted its head so fast you could hardly see it move: but its bite was still so weak as to be painless, even to a child.

Emily drew a deep breath, fascinated.



"May I have him for the night?" she asked.

"All right," said Harold: and he and Rachel were summoned away by someone without.

Emily was translated into Heaven. So this was an alligator! She was actually going to sleep with an alligator! She had thought that to anyone who had once been in an earthquake nothing really exciting could happen again: but then, she had not thought of this.

*There was once a girl called Emily, who slept with an alligator . . .*

In search of greater warmth, the creature high-stepped warily up the bed towards her face. About six inches away it paused, and they looked each other in the eye, those two children.

The eye of an alligator is large, protruding, and of a brilliant yellow, with a slit pupil like a cat's. A cat's eye, to the casual observer, is expressionless: though with atten-

tion one can distinguish in it many changes of emotion. But the eye of an alligator is infinitely more stony, and brilliant—reptilian.

What possible meaning could Emily find in such an eye? Yet she lay there, and stared, and stared: and the alligator stared too. If there had been an observer it might have given him a shiver to see them so—well, eye to eye like that.

Presently the beast opened his mouth and hissed again gently. Emily lifted a finger and began to rub the corner of his jaw. The hiss changed to a sound almost like a purr. A thin, filmy lid first covered his eye from the front backwards, then the outer lid closed up from below.

Suddenly he opened his eyes again, and snapped on her finger: then turned and wormed his way into the neck of her nightgown, and crawled down inside, cool and rough against her skin, till he found a place

to rest. It is surprising that she could stand it, as she did, without flinching.

Alligators are utterly untamable.

## iv

From the deck of the schooner, Jonsen and Otto watched the children climb onto the steamer: watched their boat return, and the steamer get under way.

So: it had all gone without a hitch. No one had suspected his story—a story so simple as to be very nearly the truth.

They were gone.

Jonsen could feel the difference at once: and it seemed almost as if the schooner could. A schooner, after all, is a place for *men*. He stretched himself, and took a deep breath, feeling that a cloying, enervating influence was lifted. José was industriously sweeping

up some of Rachel's abandoned babies. He swept them into the lee scuppers. He drew a bucket of water, and dashed it at them over the deck. The trap swung open—whew, it was gone, all that truck!

"Batten down that forehatch!" ordered Jonsen.

The men all seemed lighter of heart than they had been for many months: as if the weight they were relieved of had been enormous. They sang as they worked, and two friends playfully pummelled each other in passing—hard. The lean, masculine schooner shivered and plunged in the freshening evening breeze. A shower of spray for no particular reason suddenly burst over the bows, swept aft and dashed full in Jonsen's face. He shook his head like a wet dog, and grinned.

Rum appeared: and for the first time since the encounter with the Dutch steamer all the sailors got bestially drunk, and lay about the



deck, and were sick in the scuppers. José was belching like a bassoon.

It was dark by then. The breeze dropped away again. The gaffs clanked aimlessly in the calm, with the motion of the sea: the empty sails flapped with reports like cannon, a hearty applause. Jonsen and Otto themselves remained sober, but they had not the heart to discipline the crew.

The steamer had long since disappeared into the dark. The foreboding which had oppressed Jonsen all the night before was gone. No intuition told him of Emily's whispering to the stewardess: of the steamer, shortly after, meeting with a British gunboat: of the long series of lights flickering between them. The gunboat, even now, was fast overhauling him: but no premonition disturbed his short peace.

He was tired—as tired as a sailor ever lets himself be. The last twenty-four hours had





But this wonderful idea of his, now that he had carried it out successfully, solved both difficulties.

It had been a near thing with that little bitch Margaret, though . . . lucky the second boat had picked her up. . . .

The light from the cabin lamp shone into the bunk, illuminating part of the wall defaced with Emily's puerile drawings. As they caught his eye a frown gathered on his forehead: but as well a sudden twinge affected his heart. He remembered the way she had lain there, ill and helpless. He suddenly found himself remembering at least forty things about her—an overwhelming flood of memories.

The pencil she had used was still among the bedding, and his fingers happened on it. There were still some white spaces not drawn on.

Jonsen could only draw two things: ships, and naked women. He could draw any type





A recollection descended on his mind like a cold douche, something he had completely forgotten about till then. His heart sank—as well it might:

“Hey!” he called to Otto on the deck above: “What was the name of that boy who broke his neck at Santa? Jim? Sam? What was he called?”

Otto did not answer, except by a long-drawn-out whistle.



## *Chapter Ten*

EMILY grew quite a lot during the passage to England on the steamer: suddenly shot up, as children will at that age. But she did it without any gawkiness: instead, an actual increase of grace. Her legs and arms, though longer, did not lose any of the nicety of their shape; and her grave face lost none of its attractiveness by being a fraction nearer your own. The only drawback was that she used to get pains in the calves of her legs, now, and sometimes in her back: but those of course did not show. (They were all provided with clothes by a general collection, so it did not matter that she grew out of her old ones.)

She was a nice child: and being a little

less shy than formerly was soon the most popular of all of them. Somehow, no one seemed to care very much for Margaret: old ladies used to shake their heads over her a good deal. At least, anyone could see that Emily had infinitely more sense.

You would never have believed that Edward after a few days washing and combing would look such a little gentleman.

After a short while Rachel threw Harold over, to be uninterrupted in her peculiar habits of parthenogenesis, eased now a little by the many presents of real dolls. But Harold became soon just as firm friends with Laura, young though she was.

Most of the steamer children had made friends with the seamen, and loved to follow them about at their romantic occupations—swabbing decks, and so on. One day, one of these men actually went a short way up the rigging (what little there was), leaving a glow of admiration on the deck below. But





her own time: to her new friend, perhaps. But this she did not do. She would not talk about the schooner, or the pirates, or anything concerning them: what she wanted was to listen, to drink in all she could learn about England, where they were really going at last—that wonderfully exotic, romantic place.

Louisa Dawson was quite a wise young person for her years. She saw that Emily did not want to talk about the horrors she had been through: but considered it far better that she should be made to talk than that she should brood over them in secret. So when the days passed and no confidences came she set herself to draw the child out. She had, as everybody has, a pretty clear idea in her own head of what life is like in a pirate vessel. That these little innocents should have come through it alive was miraculous, like the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.

“Where used you to live, when you were









she, little Emily, had had experiences? But she never dared. Suppose that to Miss Dawson earthquakes were as familiar as railway trains: the fiasco would be unbearable. As for the alligator, Miss Dawson had told Harold to take it away as if it was a worm.

Sometimes Miss Dawson sat silently fondling Emily, looking now at her, now at the other children at play. How difficult it was to imagine that these happy-looking creatures had been, for months together, in hourly danger of their lives! Why had they not died of fright? She was sure that she would have. Or at least gone stark, staring, raving mad?

She had always wondered how people survived even a moment of danger without dropping dead with fear: but months and months . . . and children. . . . Her head could not swallow it.

As for that other question, how dearly she would have liked to ask it, if only she could have devised a formula delicate enough.



Meanwhile Emily's passion for her was nearing its crisis; and one day this was provoked. Miss Dawson kissed Emily three times, and told her in future to call her Lulu.

Emily jumped as if shot. Call this goddess by her Christian name? She burnt a glowing vermilion at the very thought. The Christian names of all grown-ups were sacred: something never to be uttered by childish lips: to do so, the most blasphemous disrespect.

For Miss Dawson to tell her to do so, was as embarrassing as if she had seen written up in Church PLEASE SPIT.

Of course if Miss Dawson told her to call her Lulu, at least she must not call her Miss Dawson any more. But say . . . the Other Word aloud, her very lips refused.

And so, for some time by elaborate subterfuges she managed to avoid calling her anything at all. But the difficulty of this in-

creased in geometrical progression: it began to render all intercourse an intolerable strain.

Before long she was avoiding Miss Dawson.

Miss Dawson was terribly wounded: what could she have done to offend this strange child? ("Little Fairy-girl," she used to call her.) The darling had seemed so fond of her, but now. . . .

So Miss Dawson used to follow her about the ship with hurt eyes, and Emily used to escape from her with scarlet cheeks. They had never had a real talk, heart to heart, again, by the time the steamer reached England.

ii

When the steamer took in her pilot, you may imagine that her news travelled ashore; and also, that it quickly reached the *Times* newspaper.





Mr. and Mrs. Bas-Thornton, after the disaster, unable to bear Jamaica any longer, had sold Ferndale for a song and travelled straight back to England, where Mr. Thornton soon got posts as London dramatic critic to various Colonial newspapers, and manipulated rather remote influence at the Admiralty in the hope of getting a punitive expedition sent against the whole island of Cuba. It was thus the *Times* which, in its quiet way, broke the news to them, the very morning that the steamer docked at Tilbury.

She was a long time doing it, owing to the fog, out of which the gigantic noises of dockland reverberated unintelligibly. Voices shouted things from the quays. Bells ting-alinged. The children welded themselves into a compact mass facing outwards, an improvised Argus determined to miss nothing whatever. But they could not gather really what anything was about, much less everything.









Margaret fell back again into the shadows: and Mrs. Thornton was too distracted to be as shocked as she would normally have been.

Mr. Thornton however was just sane enough to take in the situation. "Come on, Margaret!" he said: "Margaret's *my* pal! Let's go and look for a cab!"

He took the girl's arm, bowing his fine shoulders, and walked off with her up the platform.

They found a cab, and brought it to the scene, and they all got in, Mrs. Thornton just remembering to say "How-d'you-do-good-bye" to Miss Dawson.

Packing themselves inside was difficult. It was in the middle of it all that Mrs. Thornton suddenly exclaimed:

"But where's John?"

The children fell immediately silent.

"Where is he?—Wasn't he on the train with you?"





The children's bewilderment lasted. London was not what they had expected, but it was even more astounding. From time to time however they would realise how this or that did chime in with something they had been told, though not at all with the idea that the telling had conjured up. On these occasions they felt something as Saint Matthew must have felt when, after recounting some trivial incident, he adds "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet So-and-so."

"Why look!" exclaimed Edward: "There's only toys in this store!"

"Why, don't you remember . . ." began Emily.

Yes, their Mother had told them, on a visit to their Father's general store in St. Anne's, that in London there were stores which not only sold toys but which sold toys only. At that time, they hardly knew what toys were. A cousin in England had once sent them out



some expensive wax dolls, but even before the box was opened the wax had melted: consequently the only dolls they had were empty bottles, which they clothed with bits of rag. These had another advantage over the wax kind: you could feed them, poking it into the neck. If you put in some water too, in a day or so the food began to digest, visibly. The bottles with square shoulders they called He-beasties, and the bottles with round shoulders they called She-beasties.

Their other toys were mostly freakish sticks, and different kinds of seeds and berries. No wonder it seemed strange to them to imagine these things in a shop. But the idea engaged them, nevertheless. Down by the bathing-hole there were several enormous cotton-trees, which lift themselves on their roots right out of the earth, as on stilts, making a big cage. One of these they dubbed their toy-shop: decorated it up with lace-bark, and strings of bright-coloured seeds, and





but none of the other children in the Terrace were allowed to play in the mud at all.

Emily did not play in the mud either; it was only the little ones.

Mr. Thornton was generally at a theatre till the small hours; and when he came home used to sit and write, and then he would go out, about dawn, to the post. The children were often awake in time to hear him going to bed. He drank whiskey while he worked, and that helped him to sleep all the morning (they had to be quiet too). But he got up for luncheon, and then he often had battles with their mother about the food. She would try to make him eat it.

All that spring they were an object of wonder to their acquaintances, as they had been on the steamer; and also an object of pity. In the wide world they had become almost national figures: but it was easier to hide this from them then than it would be nowadays. But people—friends—would often come and



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of Jonsen and his crew, not, as formerly, in alliance with or superseding them.

The children listened to all they were told: and according to their ages believed it. Having as yet little sense of contradiction they blended it quite easily in their minds with their own memories; or sometimes it even cast their memories out. Who were they, children, to know better what had happened to them than grown-ups?

Mrs. Thornton was a feeling, but an essentially Christian woman. The death of John was a blow to her from which she would never recover, as indeed the death of all of them had once been. But she taught the children in saying their prayers to thank God for John's noble end and let it always be an example to them: and then she taught them to ask God to forgive the pirates for all their cruelty to them. (She explained to them that God could only do this when they had been properly punished on Earth.) The only one

Emily, said: "Why don't you tell Mr. Mathias about your adventures?"

"Oh yes!" said Mr. Mathias, "Do tell me all about it.—Let me see, you're . . ."

"Emily," whispered Mr. Thornton.

"Age?"

"Ten."

Mr. Mathias reached for a piece of clean paper and a pen.

"What adventures?" asked Emily clearly.

"Well," said Mr. Mathias, "you started for England on a sailing-ship, didn't you? The *Clorinda*?"

"Yes. She was a barque."

"And then what happened?"

She paused before answering.

"There was a monkey," she said judicially.

"A monkey?"

"And a lot of turtles," put in Rachel.

"Tell him about the pirates," prompted Mrs Thornton. Mr. Mathias frowned at her

slightly: "Let her tell it in her own words, please."

"Oh yes," said Emily dully, "We were captured by pirates, of course."

Both Edward and Laura sat up at the word, stiff as spokes.

"Weren't you with them too, Miss Fernandez?" Mr. Mathias asked.

Miss Fernandez! Everyone turned to see who he could mean. He was looking at Margaret.

"Me?" she said suddenly, as if waking up.

"Yes, you! Go on!" said her aunt.

"Say yes," prompted Edward: "You were with us, weren't you?"

"Yes," said Margaret, smiling.

"Then why couldn't you say so?" hectored Edward.

Mr. Mathias silently noted this curious treatment of the eldest: and Mrs. Thornton told Edward he mustn't speak like that.

"Tell us what you remember about the



"*Bung!*" contributed Harry to his support, from under the arm of the fanatical aunt.

"Bim-bam, bim-bam," sing-songed Laura, suddenly waking up and starting a tatoo of her own.

"Shut up!" cried Mr. Thornton. "Did you, or did you not, any of you, see them hit anybody?"

"Cut off their heads!" cried Edward, "And throw them in the sea!—Far, far . . ." his eyes became dreamy and sad.

"They didn't hit anybody," said Emily. "There wasn't anyone to hit."

"Then where were all the sailors?" asked Mr. Mathias.

"They were all up the rigging," said Emily.

"I see," said Mr. Mathias. "Er—didn't you say the monkey was in the rigging?"

"He broke his neck," said Rachel. She wrinkled up her nose disgustedly: "He was drunk."



"His tail was rotted," explained Harry.

"Well," said Mr. Mathias, "when they came on board, what did they do?"

There was a general silence.

"Come come! What did they do?—What did they do, Miss Fernandez?"

"I don't know."

"Emily?"

"I don't know."

He sat back in despair: "But you saw them!"

"No we didn't," said Emily, "We went in the deck-house."

"And stayed there?"

"We couldn't open the door."

"*Bang-bang-bang!*" Laura suddenly rapped out.

"Shut up!"

"And then, when they let you out?"

"We went on the schooner."

"Were you frightened?"

"What of?"



"Well: them."

"Who?"

"The pirates."

"Why should we?"

"They didn't do anything to frighten you?"

"To *frighten* us?"

"Coo! José did belch!" Edward interjected merrily, and began giving an imitation. Mrs. Thornton chid him.

"Now," said Mr. Mathias gravely, "there's something I want you to tell me, Emily. When you were with the pirates, did they ever do anything you didn't like? You know what I mean, something *nasty*?"

"Yes!" cried Rachel, and everyone turned to her. "He talked about drawers," she said in a shocked voice.

"What did he say?"

"He told us once not to toboggan down the deck on them," put in Emily uncomfortably.

"Was that all?"



"Another time would be much better," she said: and Mr. Mathias turned the examination back to the capture of the *Clorinda*.

But they seemed to have been strangely unobservant of what went on around them, he found.

v

When the others had all gone, Mathias offered Thornton, whom he liked, a cigar: and the two sat together for a while over the fire.

"Well," said Thornton, "Did the interview go as you had expected?"

"Pretty much."

"I noticed you questioned them chiefly about the *Clorinda*. But you have got all the evidence you need on that score, surely?"

"Naturally I did. Anything they affirmed I could check exactly by Marpole's detailed affidavit. I wanted to test their reliability."



"And you found?"

"What I have always known. That I would rather extract information from the devil himself than from a child."

"But what information exactly do you need?"

"Everything. The whole story."

"You know it."

Mathias spoke with a hint of exasperation:

"Do you realise, Thornton, that without considerable help from them we may even fail to get a conviction?"

"What is the difficulty?" asked Thornton, in a peculiar, restrained tone.

"We could get a conviction for piracy of course. But since '37, piracy has ceased to be a hanging offence unless it is accompanied by murder."

"And is the killing of one small boy insufficient to count as murder?" asked Thornton, in the same cold voice.

Mathias looked at him curiously.

thing definite. We have not got it. Take the second case, the piracy of the Dutch steamer. We are in the same difficulty there: a man is taken on board the schooner, he disappears. What happened? We can only surmise."

"Isn't there such a thing as turning King's Evidence?"

"Another most unsatisfactory proceeding, to which I should be very loath to have recourse. No, the natural and proper witnesses are the children. There is a kind of beauty in making them, who have suffered so much at the hands of these men, the instruments of justice upon them."

Mathias paused, and looked at Thornton narrowly.

"You haven't been able, in all these weeks, to get the smallest hint from them with regard to the death of Captain Vandervoort either?"

"None."



"It is a fact."

Mathias shrugged. After all, a criminal lawyer is not concerned with facts, he is concerned with probabilities. It is the novelist who is concerned with facts, whose job it is to say what a particular man did do on a particular occasion: the lawyer does not, cannot be expected to go further than to show what the ordinary man would be most likely to do under presumed circumstances.

Mathias, as he conned these paradoxes, smiled a little grimly. It would never do to give utterance to them.

"I think if they know anything I shall be able to find it out," was all he said.

"D'you mean to put them in the box?" Thornton asked suddenly.

"Not all of them, certainly: Heaven forbid! But we shall have to produce one of them at least, I am afraid."

"Which?"

"Well. We had intended it to be the

say what they think you want them to say. And then they say what they think the opposing counsel wants them to say too—if they like his face.”

Thornton gesticulated—a foreign habit.

“I think I’ll take her to Madame Tussaud’s on Thursday afternoon and try my luck,” ended Mathias: and the two bade each other goodbye.

vi

Emily enjoyed the wax-works; even though she did not know that a wax-work of Captain Jonsen, his scowling face bloody and a knife in his hand, was already in contemplation. She got on well with Mr. Mathias. She felt very grown-up, going out at last without the little ones endlessly tagging. Afterwards he took her to a bun-shop in Baker Street, and tried to persuade her to

pour out his tea for him: but she turned shy at that, and he had in the end to do it for himself.

Mr. Mathias, like Miss Dawson, spent a good deal of his time and energy in courting the child's liking. He was at least sufficiently successful for it to come as a complete surprise to her, when he presently began to throw out questions about the death of Captain Vandervoort. Their studied casualness did not deceive her for a moment. He learnt nothing: but she was hardly home, and his carriage departed, than she was violently sick. Presumably she had eaten too many cream buns. But, as she lay in bed sipping from a tumbler of water in that mood of fatalism which follows on the heels of vomiting, Emily had a lot to think over, as well as an opportunity of doing so without emotion.

Her father was spending a rare evening at home: and now he stood unseen in the shadows of her bedroom, watching her. To his

fantastic mind, the little chit seemed the stage of a great tragedy: and while his bowels of compassion yearned towards the child of his loins, his intellect was delighted at the beautiful, the subtle combination of the contending forces which he read into the situation. He was like a powerless stalled audience, which pities unbearably, but would not on any account have missed the play.

But as he stood now watching her, his sensitive eyes communicated to him an emotion which was not pity and was not delight: he realised, with a sudden painful shock, that he was afraid of her!

But surely it was some trick of the candle-light, or of her indisposition, that gave her face momentarily that inhuman, stony, basilisk look?

Just as he was tiptoe-ing from the room, she burst out into a sudden, despairing moan, and leaning half out of her bed began again an ineffectual, painful retching. Thornton

persuaded her to drink off her tumbler of water, and then held her hot moist temples between his hands till at last she sank back, exhausted, in a complete passivity, and slipped off to sleep.

There were several other occasions after this when Mr. Mathias took her out on excursions, or simply came and examined her at the house. But still he learnt nothing.

What was in her mind now? I can no longer read Emily's deeper thoughts, or handle their cords. Henceforth we must be content to surmise.

As for Mathias, there was nothing for it but to accept the defeat at her hands, and then explain it away to himself. He ceased to believe that she had anything to hide, because, if she had, he was convinced she could not have hidden it.

But if she could not give him any information, she remained, spectacularly speaking, a

make one aware that here the Real Presence
is: the presence of death.

As Emily came into court, past the many men in black gowns writing with their quill pens, she did not at first see judge, jury, or prisoners. Her eye was caught by the face of the Clerk, where he sat below the bench. It was an old and very beautiful face, cultured, unearthly refined. His head laid back, his mouth slightly open, his eyes closed, he was gently sleeping.

That face remained etched on her mind as she was shown her way into the box. Then the Oath, which formed the opening passages of her catechism, was administered; and with its familiar phrases her nervousness vanished, and with complete confidence she sang out her responses to the familiar questions which Mr. Mathias, in fancy dress, was putting to her. But until he had finished she kept her eyes fixed on the rail in front of her, for fear something should confuse her.

mean either that the child knew nothing of it, itself a valuable lacuna in the evidence to establish, or that what she did know was somehow in his clients' favour. Up till now, he had meant to pursue the obvious tactics—question her on the evidence she had already given, perhaps frighten her, at any rate confuse her and make her contradict herself. But anyone, even a jury, could see through that. Nor was there any hope, under any circumstances, of a total acquittal: the most he could hope for was escape from the murder charge.

He suddenly decided to change his whole policy. When he spoke, his voice too was kind (though it lacked perforce the full benign timbre of the judge's). He would make no attempt to confuse her. By his sympathy with her, he hoped for the sympathy, himself, of the court.

His first few questions were of a general nature: and he continued them until her answers were given with complete confidence.

blood . . . he was awful! He . . . he died, he said something and then he *died!*"

That was all that was articulate. Watkin sat down, thunderstruck. The effect on the court could hardly have been greater. As for Mathias, he did not show surprise: he looked more like a man who has dug a pit into which his enemy has fallen.

The judge leant forward and tried to question her: but she only sobbed and screamed. He tried to soothe her: but by now she had become too hysterical for that. She had already, however, said quite enough for the matter in hand: and they let her father come forward and lift her out of the box.

As he stepped down with her she caught sight for the first time of Jonsen and the crew, huddled up together in a sort of pen. But they were much thinner than the last time she had seen them. The terrible look on Jonsen's face as his eye met hers, what was it that it reminded her of?



Her father hurried her home. As soon as she was in the cab she became herself again with a surprising rapidity. She began to talk about all she had seen, just as if it had been a party: the man asleep, and the man drawing funny faces, and the man with the bunch of flowers, and had she said her piece properly?

"Captain was there," she said: "Did you see him?"

"What was it all about?" she asked presently: "Why did I have to learn all those questions?"

Mr. Thornton made no attempt to answer her questions: he even shrank back, physically, from touching his child Emily. His mind reeled with the many possibilities. Was it conceivable she was such an idiot as really not to know what it was all about? Could she possibly not know what she had done? He stole a look at her innocent little face, even the tear-stains now gone. What was he to think?

But as if she read his thoughts, he saw a faint cloud gather.

"What are they going to do to Captain?" she asked, a faint hint of anxiety in her voice.

Still he made no answer. In Emily's head the Captain's face, as she had last seen it . . . what was it she was trying to remember?

Suddenly she burst out:

"Father, *what* did happen to Tabby in the end, that dreadful windy night in Jamaica?"

vii

Trials are quickly over, once they begin. It was no time before the judge had condemned these prisoners to death and was trying someone else with the same concentrated, benevolent, individual attention.

Afterwards, a few of the crew were reprieved and transported.



The night before the execution, Jonsen managed to cut his throat: but they found out in time to bandage him up. He was unconscious by the morning, and had to be carried to the gallows in a chair: indeed, he was finally hanged in it. Otto bent over once and kissed his forehead; but he was completely insensible.

It was the negro cook, however, according to the account in the Times, who figured most prominently. He showed no fear of death himself, and tried to comfort the others.

"We have all come here to die," he said: "*That*" (pointing to the gallows) "was not built for nothing. We shall certainly end our lives in this place: nothing can now save us. But in a few years we should die in any case. In a few years the judge who condemned us, all men now living, will be dead. *You* know that I die innocent: anything I

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have done, I was forced to do by the rest of you. But I am not sorry. I would rather die now, innocent, than in a few years perhaps guilty of some great crime.”

viii

It was a few days later that the term began, and Mr. and Mrs. Thornton took Emily to her new school at Blackheath. While they remained to tea with the head mistress, Emily was introduced to her new playmates.

“Poor little thing,” said the mistress, “I hope she will soon forget the terrible things she has been through. I think our girls will have an especially kind corner in their hearts for her.”

In another room, Emily with the other new girls was making friends with the older pupils. Looking at that gentle, happy throng



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